

*****PRESS RELEASE*****

Jailed Saudi Human Rights attorney, Waleed Abu Al-Khair, who was unjustly sentenced to 15 years in prison for advocating for human rights and has been imprisoned in Saudi Arabia for over a year, has just been awarded the highly prestigious 2015 20th Lodovic-Trarieux Human Rights International Prize.

His U.S. Defense Lawyer, Daniel N. Arshack, who sought to visit with Mr. Abu Al-Khair in the Saudi Arabian prison, has been denied a Saudi Travel Visa despite written U.S. State Department support.

Saudi cables just revealed by WikiLeaks prove that the Saudis lied to Hilary Clinton when she inquired of the Saudis why Mr. Abu Al-Khair would not be permitted to attend a forum about democratic leadership in Syracuse.

2015 20th Lodovic-Trarieux Human Rights International Prize

On June 12, 2015, a panel of European attorneys and representatives of European Bars recognized Mr. Abu Al-Khair with Europe's most prestigious human rights award, the **20th Lodovic-Trarieux Human Rights International Prize** award, <http://www.ludovictrarieux.org/uk-page3.callplt2015.htm> which was first given to Nelson Mandela in 1985. Waleed Abu Al-Khair has been unjustly imprisoned in Saudi Arabia as a result of his human rights advocacy activities in Saudi Arabia since February 2014.

Human rights attorney Waleed Abu Al-Khair angered the Monarchy of Saudi Arabia by founding the Monitor of Human Rights in Saudi Arabia (MHRSA) <http://mhrsa.org/en/> in 2012. He represented fellow reform activists who themselves were charged with crimes against the Kingdom related to their calls for reform of the brutal monarchy. Mr. Abu Al-Khair was arrested while representing the political dissident **Raif Badawi**, who was sentenced to 10 years in prison and 1,000 lashes for establishing a website that was critical of the regime and allowed for open discourse regarding religion.¹ Mr. Abu Al-Khair is married to and has a daughter with Saudi women's rights' advocate Samar Badawi https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Samar_Badawi (Raif Badawi's sister), who was herself jailed and now is subject to a travel ban for advocating for the rights of women under the repressive Saudi regime. In 2014, with the appeal of Mr. Badawi's case underway, Mr. Abu Al-Khair was detained under the anti-terrorism law and convicted of crimes against the state including "inflaming public opinion," "disparaging and insulting judicial authority," "making international organizations hostile to the Kingdom," and violating Saudi Arabia's anti-cybercrime law. In fact, all these human rights advocacy activities occurred before the Saudi anti-terrorism law, under which he was inexplicably prosecuted, was even enacted. Mr. Abu Al-Khair was summarily sentenced to 15 years in prison in January 2015. He was also fined, subject to a long-term travel ban, and ordered to shut down all of his online accounts.

Since neither Mr. Abu Al-Khair nor his wife can attend the **20th Lodovic-Trarieux Human Rights International Prize** award ceremony in Geneva, Mr. Arshack will receive the award on Mr. Abu Al-Khair's behalf.

¹ Mr. Abu Al-Khair's and Mr. Badawi's cases gained international attention through ongoing Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch campaigns condemning his punishment.

U.S. International Defense Lawyer Daniel N. Arshack is denied a Saudi Travel Visa to visit with Mr. Abu Al-Khair

U.S. international defense attorney Daniel Arshack, based in New York City, has represented Mr. Abu Al-Khair since February 2015. Due to the obvious risk posed to Saudi Arabian lawyers who might be willing to represent Mr. Abu Al-Khair, Mr. Abu Al-Khair sought U.S. counsel to advocate on his behalf and signed a power of attorney to have Mr. Arshack represent him. After meeting with United States Department of State representatives, Mr. Arshack received a letter written by the Department of State addressed to the Saudi Ambassador which “directly requests that the Embassy issue Arshack a visa.” The meeting would have been the first between the imprisoned Mr. Abu-Al-Khair and his lawyer. In his own direct appeal to the Ambassador, Mr. Arshack stated: “It is my sincere belief that a solution to the issues posed by Waleed’s incarceration will be most likely found in quiet, diplomatic discussion and compromise and not in bold, inflammatory public displays.”

But now the regime has further limited Mr. Abu Al-Khair’s access to justice by denying the visa application. The rapid denial of Mr. Arshack’s and the State Department’s request indicates that Saudi officials are prepared to further strain their relations with the U.S. by disregarding basic human rights. Remarkably, although the country is currently a member of the United Nations Human Rights Council, and a strategic ally of the United States, it has been identified as a major human rights violator in a recent U.S. Department of State report <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/#wrapper> .

Mr. Abu Al-Khair, a previously vocal human rights advocate, is ill and suffering from increasingly severe symptoms of diabetes, a condition for which he has not received necessary medical treatment while in prison. He has been subjected to multiple beatings and has been denied basic medical care while incarcerated. Recently, in an obvious effort to demoralize Mr. Abu Al-Khair, the Monarchy moved him to a location over 500 miles away from his wife and daughter.

Mr. Arshack stated, “Waleed’s summary conviction was unjust. His conduct was non-violent and as a son of Saudi Arabia, his only desire was to participate in building a sustainable, fair and just society in which he could raise his daughter free from intimidation and thought control. The conditions of his incarceration are barbaric. Now, during the holy month of Ramadan when pardon’s and amnesty are often issued, the Monarchy should focus its wrath on violent Islamists who do indeed threaten the stability of the country and not on those, like Mr. Abu Al-Khair and Mr. Badawi, who seek to contribute to the future of Saudi Arabia through peaceful and respectful discourse and legal advocacy. These peaceful advocates of human rights should be pardoned and released from prison immediately.”

Human Rights Watch has also decried Mr. Abu Al-Khair’s imprisonment as evidence of “how far Saudi Arabia will go to silence those with the courage to speak out for human rights and political reform.”²

² See [Saudi Arabia: 15-Year Sentence for Prominent Activist](#).

**Saudi cables released by WikiLeaks expose Saudi lies told to the United States about
Waleed Abu Al-Khair**

On June 19, 2015, WikiLeaks began revealing “more than half a million cables and other documents from the Saudi Foreign Ministry that contain secret communications from various Saudi Embassies around the world. The publication includes "Top Secret" reports from other Saudi State institutions, including the Ministry of Interior and the Kingdom's General Intelligence Services.” <https://wikileaks.org/saudi-cables/press>. Amongst those cables are two that relate specifically to Mr. Abu Al-Khair. One is addressed to the Minister of the Interior, then Nayef bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, now deceased. The cable, dated May 3, 2012, explained that Hilary Clinton, then Secretary of State, had formally requested that the Saudi Ambassador in Washington explain why Mr. Abu Al-Khair “was denied permission to travel to Washington to attend a forum about democratic leadership.” The Forum was a six-week course titled "Democratic leaders" at Syracuse University in New York sponsored by the US State Department. In response, the Minister of the Interior lied that he was detained in Saudi Arabia because of a dispute with his father in law. That bizarre excuse for detaining him was a blatant lie.

Further, the minister of the Interior sought to disparage the reputation of both Mr. Abu Al-Khair and his wife, Ms. Badawi, by falsely claiming that they had converted from Sunni to Shiite Islam. The Saudi Monarchy has a history of discriminating against the Shiite minority in Saudi Arabia and only recognizes an extreme type of Sunni Islam, Wahhabi, as the only true Muslim faith. The truth is that both Mr. Abu Al-Khair and his wife have always been Sunni Muslims and continue to be to this day.

The real reason that Mr. Abu Al-Khair was not permitted to travel to Washington in May of 2012 to attend the Democracy forum was that in April, 2012, he had published an article in the Washington Post entitled, “Steadfast in Pursuing a Freer Saudi Arabia.” http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/steadfast-in-pursuing-a-freer-saudi-arabia/2012/04/20/gIQAoAiUWT_story.html . Immediately thereafter, Mr. Abu Al-Khair was summoned by the Bureau of Investigation and Prosecution in Jeddah and told that he was banned from traveling. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2012/03/saudi-arabian-human-rights-lawyer-banned-travelling-us/> . That is the simple truth. The Saudis lied to their “ally” the United States Secretary of State, Secretary Clinton.

Mr. Arshack states: “I will continue to promote the goals of my client Mr. Abu Al-Khari and hope that democracy loving countries around the world will insist that Saudi Arabia release those peaceful advocates of freedom and human rights who are only a threat to tyrannical despots who are too afraid to engage in rational discourse.”

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