



Women living under muslim laws
النساء في ظل قوانين المسلمين
Femmes sous lois musulmanes

Transnational Solidarity Network

Joint Statement – WLUML and VNC condemn the arrest of Wajeha Al-Huwaider and Fawzia Al-Oyouni and the persecution of human rights activists in Saudi Arabia

Women Living Under Muslim Laws (WLUML) and the Violence is Not Our Culture Campaign (VNC) strongly condemn the conviction of two Saudi Arabian women's rights activists, Wajeha Al-Huwaider and Fawzia Al-Oyouni, for the crime of *takhib*, or incitement of a wife to defy her husband. Wajeha Al-Huwaider and Fawzia Al-Oyouni have been long time campaigners for women's rights in Saudi Arabia; they pioneered the Women2Drive campaign - a campaign for Saudi women to be allowed to drive - in addition to offering support to women victims of domestic abuse.

In June 2011 Ms Al-Huwaider and Ms Al-Oyouni responded to a call for help from a woman attempting to flee her husband, after the woman reported that he had been abusing her. The wife is a Canadian citizen married to a Saudi national and had asked the women to meet her at her home to help her get to the Canadian Embassy. When they arrived, it became clear that the husband had used his wife's cell phone to trick Ms Al-Huwaider and Ms Al-Oyouni into coming at that time and had arranged for the police to be there. After the original charges of kidnap were dropped in 2011, the women were charged again on the 15th of June 2013, this time with *takhib* and sentenced to 10 months imprisonment and two-year travel bans. They appealed their conviction, but the sentence was upheld.

This case is just one insight into a larger picture of repression in Saudi Arabia, where civil society organising is forbidden by law, unelected religious authorities have extensive political power, and where brutal corporal and capital punishments are practised. With specific regard to women's rights and gender equality, the situation is especially dire; rape is not specifically criminalised in Saudi Arabia and child marriages are widespread. Women's freedoms of movement, speech and association are extremely restricted due to conservative interpretations of religion that promote a system of male guardianship and control over women.

In this context, there is little recourse for women suffering from domestic violence and a culture of impunity for perpetrators of such violence. WLUML is gravely concerned about what this case means for women subject to domestic violence in Saudi Arabia, and what it suggests for those who attempt to speak out against violence. We interpret the sentencing as an attempt by the regime to silence human and women's rights advocates in the country.

WLUML [welcomed](#) the reforms regarding women's participation in public life set out by King Abdullah Bin-Abd-al-Aziz Al Saud in 2011. However, we are aware that the proposal of any such reforms – already tentative and limited – stands at odds with the ultra-conservative backlash that comes in response both to reforms from above and women's acts of defiance from below.

We urge the government of Saudi Arabia to:

1. Overturn the prison sentence and travel bans imposed on Ms Al-Huwaider and Ms Al-Oyouni;
2. Ensure the immediate release of Ms Al-Huwaider and Ms Al-Oyouni; and
3. End all crackdowns on and persecutions of peaceful human rights activists in Saudi Arabia.

We urge the international community to:

1. Demand that Saudi Arabia lives up to its obligations under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, to which the Kingdom is a state party and;
2. Support advocacy efforts by WLUML and other human rights organizations in support of the release of Ms Al-Huwaider and Ms Al-Oyouni.

We thank you for your support.

22nd October 2013