

SAUDI ARABIA

Freedom of thought and freedom of expression related to Islam are not welcome in Saudi Arabia and may be interpreted as a form blasphemy or apostasy. Several Muslims have been arrested and sentenced to prison terms, sometimes with physical punishments, on such grounds.

Muslims

Raif BADAWI, laureate of the 2015 Sakharov Prize, EU human rights award

Date of birth: 1984

Date and place of arrest: On 17th June 2012

Charges: Apostasy and setting up a website that undermines general security and ridiculing Islamic religious figures

Statement of the defendant: Raif stated that Muslims, Jews, Christians and atheists are all equal. He claims he never attacked Islam and he only sought to provide a forum for open debate.

First court decision: On 29th July 2013, Badawi was sentenced to six hundred lashes and seven years in prison. An additional three months was added for ‘parental disobedience’.

Last court decision: In June 2015, the Supreme Court upheld a heavier sentence of ten years in prison and 1,000 lashes. He also received a fine of one million riyal [approximately €247,314].

Other information: Raif was first sentenced for violating IT law and insulting Saudi Arabia’s Committee for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice through his online writings, and hosting those of others on the “Free Saudi Liberals” website. He got a first round of fifty lashes, but, thanks to the continuous mobilization of the international community, the implementation of the punishment was interrupted. There are reports his flogging resumed in October 2015 inside a prison. Though his fate remains uncertain. On 29th October 2015, the Sakharov Prize, EU’s human rights award, was granted to Raif Badawi.

Source: <http://www.humanistperspectives.org/issue195/watson.html>

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/may/17/raif-badawi-saudi-blogger-lashes-prison-ensaf-haidar>

Alaa BRINJI

Date and place of arrest: He was arrested on 12th May 2014

Charges: “Insulting the rulers of the country”, “inciting public opinion”, “accusing security officers of killing protesters in Awamiyya”, “ridiculing Islamic religious figures” and “violating Article 6 of the Anti-Cyber Crime Law”.

Statement of the defendant: He denies the charges.

Last court decision: On 24th March 2016, he was sentenced to five years in prison, an eight-year travel ban and a fine of 50,000 Saudi Arabian riyals [approximately €12,365] for a series of tweets.

Other information: Alaa Brinji is a respected journalist who has worked for the Saudi Arabian newspapers al-Bilad, Okaz and al-Sharq. He was initially held incommunicado in solitary confinement and has not been allowed access to a lawyer. His list of “offences” also originally included the act of “apostasy” which is considered a serious crime in Saudi Arabia and carries the death penalty but he was not convicted of this due to a lack of evidence.

Source: <http://www.haaretz.com/middle-east-news/1.711352>

Ashraf FAYADH

Date and place of arrest: In January 2014

Charges: He was accused of making blasphemous remarks during an argument in a cafe in the conservative city and for renouncing Islam in Instructions Within

Statement of the defendant: He denied the charges.

First court decision: He was originally sentenced to four years in prison and eight-hundred lashes for apostasy by the general court in Abha, a city in the south-west of the ultraconservative kingdom, in May 2014.

Last court decision: In February 2016, a Saudi court overturned his death sentence, imposing an eight-year prison term and eight-hundred lashes instead but he must also repent through an announcement in official media. The decision by a panel of judges came after Ashraf Fayadh’s lawyer argued his conviction was seriously flawed because he was denied a fair trial. In a briefing on the verdict, Abdulrahman al-Lahem said the judgment revoked the death sentence but upheld that the poet was guilty of apostasy.

Other information: He was born in Saudi Arabia to Palestinian refugee parents, and under Saudi law is classed as a refugee himself, without Saudi citizenship. He co-curated a Saudi art show at the 2013 Venice Biennale. His father died of a stroke after hearing of his death sentence, but the poet was not allowed to attend the funeral.

Source: <http://www.globalrights.info/2017/01/75775/>
<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-35476183>

Shia Muslim

Sheik TAWFIQ AL-AMR

Date and place of arrest: On 3rd August 2011

Charges: Defaming Saudi Arabia's ruling system, ridiculing its religious leaders, inciting sectarianism and apostasy

Statement of the defendant: He denied the charges. He was just criticizing discrimination against Saudi Arabian Shias and calling for reforms in the country.

First court decision: On 17th December 2012, Sheikh Tawfiq al-'Amr, was sentenced to three years' imprisonment, followed by a five-year travel ban and prohibited to deliver sermons.

Last court decision: In February 2016, a Saudi court imposed an eight-year prison term and eight hundred lashes instead. He must also repent through an announcement in official media.

Other information: He appears to have been convicted for the peaceful exercise of his right to freedom of thought and conscience, and freedom of expression in religious matters.

Source: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/countries/middle-east-and-north-africa/saudi-arabia/report-saudi-arabia/>