



## **NGOs Call for Immediate Release of Saudi Human Rights Lawyer Waleed Abu al-Khair**

08 January 2015 – On 12 January 2015, the public prosecutor of Saudi Arabia will again present his case against human rights defender Waleed Abu al-Khair in an appellate proceeding at the Saudi Specialized Criminal Court. The government seeks to obtain a harsher sentence on charges for which Abu al-Khair has already been convicted and imprisoned. Americans for Democracy and Human Rights in Bahrain (ADHRB) and the Bahrain Center for Human Rights (BIRD) are deeply concerned that a second prosecution of Abu al-Khair will violate his internationally-guaranteed due process rights and subject him to double jeopardy. For these reasons, we call for his immediate and unconditional release and for the original sentence against Abu al-Khair to be vacated.

Waleed Abu al-Khair is a lawyer and human rights activist who founded the [Monitor of Human Rights in Saudi Arabia](#) (MHRSA) in 2009. On 6 July 2014, he was [convicted by the Specialized Criminal Court](#) in Jeddah of “making international organizations hostile to the kingdom,” “publicly slandering the judiciary,” and “founding an unlicensed organization.” The court [sentenced](#) Abu al-Khair to 15 years in prison, a 15 year travel ban, and a fine equivalent to \$53,000. This conviction came on the heels of a separate criminal proceeding in October 2013, at which he was sentenced to [three months in prison](#) for signing a public statement critical of the government.

“Instead of seeking a harsher sentence against Abu al-Khair, the Saudi government must immediately vacate his conviction and drop all charges against him,” said Husain Abdulla, Executive Director of ADHRB. “Abu al-Khair is a human rights lawyer and prisoner of conscience who should be at home with his family, not imprisoned for exercising his basic human rights.”

Abu al-Khair was [tried and convicted](#) under new anti-terrorism legislation. Promulgated in February 2014, the Penal Law for Crimes of Terrorism and Its Financing ostensibly allows the Saudi government to better prosecute terrorists. In [practice](#), however, the government uses the law’s ambiguous language to target and imprison human rights [activists](#) and other nonviolent political [dissidents](#).

“Abu al-Khair’s conviction is further proof that the Saudi government is abusing anti-terrorism legislation to silence dissent, not protect Saudi citizens,” added Sayed Ahmed, Director of Advocacy for BIRD. “As a member of the United Nations Human Rights Council, it is unconscionable for Saudi Arabia to use draconian laws to violate internationally-protected human rights.”

**We, the undersigned human rights organizations, call on the United States, the European Union, and other national and international bodies to actively engage the Government of Saudi Arabia to:**

- Immediately vacate Waleed Abu al-Khair’s conviction, release him from custody, and drop all charges against him in relation to or in retaliation against his work;
- Replace anti-terrorism laws with legislation that does not encroach upon human rights; and
- Ensure that all civil society organizations and human rights defenders in Saudi Arabia are able to conduct their work without fear of retaliation or reprisal.