



The BENENSON SOCIETY

Campaign for Israa al-Ghomgham



Saudi Arabia is both a key player in the politics of the Middle East and a key battleground for human rights in the region. While the Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman has initiated some reforms and modernizing of the Kingdom, such as allowing women to drive, there are also periodic crackdowns on dissent.

Israa al-Ghomgham is a Shia activist who faces the possibility of being the first female activists to be executed in Saudi Arabia. She has been in detention for three years prior to her trial, at which the prosecutor is demanding the death penalty.

Her crime is using Facebook and other media to protest, her support for the minority Shia Muslim minority, her support for women's rights (a host of vague charges that include "participating in protests," "attempting to inflame public opinion," "filming protests and publishing on social media," and "providing moral support to rioters"). See the article below for more detail.

Some would say there is more chance to exert an influence now before the trial concludes than after a sentence has been pronounced. There are fears that the authorities will act quickly after any sentence is imposed.

We Have Two Months To Save Israa al-Ghomgham's Life | Opinion

Hiba Zayadin , Acting Saudi researcher at Human Rights Watch
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Despite widespread rumors, the Saudi Shia activist Israa al-Ghomgham has neither been executed nor sentenced to death. After more than three years in pretrial detention, she is now on trial alongside her husband and four other activists on protest-related charges at Saudi Arabia's notorious terrorism court. But if the Public Prosecution—an entity that reports directly to the king—has its way, al-Ghomgham, 29, may become one of the [first women sentenced to death](#) for her peaceful activism.

Israa al-Ghomgham wouldn't be the first Shia to be executed. In 2011, emboldened by the Arab Spring, Saudi Arabia's minority Shia, mostly concentrated in the Eastern Province, organized and participated in demonstrations calling for an end to the systematic discrimination they face in their own country. Israa al-Ghomgham and her husband were among them. Their demands for equal treatment and increased freedoms were met with a serious crackdown, with many of them persecuted.

The Saudi government discriminates against its Shia minority in public education, religious freedom, and employment, but the criminal justice system in particular has been repeatedly exploited to mete out draconian punishments against members of the Shia community following grossly unfair trials.

In 2014, the court unjustly sentenced eight Shia activists, including a prominent cleric, Sheikh Nimr al-Nimr, to death for their role in mass demonstrations in Saudi Arabia's majority Shia Eastern Province. And then another 14 people in 2016 for participating in the protests. Both trials were mired with fair trial violations. The authorities executed at least four Shia men, including Sheikh Nimr al-Nimr, in January 2016, along with 43 (Sunni) men on the same day, most of whom were charged with being members of al-Qa'ida. It was the largest mass execution in Saudi Arabia since 1980.

But while the authorities have often attempted to accuse Shia protesters of committing violent acts or of incitement to violence, neither al-Ghomgham nor the other five defendants have been charged with acts of violence. In the absence of a written penal code or narrowly worded regulations, judges and prosecutors in Saudi Arabia can essentially make up offenses and criminalize a wide range of acts under broad, catch-all categories. In al-Ghomgham's trial, the Public Prosecution is seeking the death penalty against five of the six activists based

on a host of vague charges that include “participating in protests,” “attempting to inflame public opinion,” “filming protests and publishing on social media,” and “providing moral support to rioters.”

This trial is taking place in parallel with the authorities’ unrelenting crackdown on women’s rights activists. More than a dozen have been arrested since mid-May, in the weeks leading up to the [lifting of the driving ban](#) on June 24 and continuing through the summer. While some have since been released, others remain detained without charge. Authorities have accused several of them of serious crimes, and nine are supposed to be referred to the same terrorism court as al-Ghomgham. Local media outlets have carried out an unprecedented campaign against them, labeling them “traitors.”

What can we do?

Please fax appeal to the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia, or send letters via the local Saudi Arabian embassy. You may consider sending a copy to your local political representative. The Crown Prince also has a Facebook site that you might like to utilize.

HRH. Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman
First Prime Minister and Defense Minister,
Riyadh,
Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Your Royal Highness,

As a member of the Benenson Society may I respectfully and urgently ask you to intervene in the prosecution of Israa al-Ghomgham in the Kingdom’s terrorism court.

Freedom of expression is a key human right, one protected by the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights. I note that the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is member of the Human Rights Council of the UN. The possibility of imposing the death penalty on a woman who has not been accused of an act of violence, but of protest, damages the reputation of the Kingdom.

We ask the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia become a model to its neighbours of tolerance and freedom.

Your Royal Highness, please intervene in this case to ensure that Israa al-Ghomgham is not sentenced to death and so become the first woman to be executed for such charges.

Respectfully,