
GERMANY

Waleed Mohammed Al Smani
Minister of Justice
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SAUDI-ARABIEN

Hamburg, March 03rd, 2024

Manahel al-Otaibi

Your Excellency,

I am alarmed that Saudi authorities have forcibly disappeared Manahel al-Otaibi since November 2023. Manahel has been detained since 16 November 2022 and although her whereabouts is still unknown, she now awaits trial in front of the Specialized Criminal Court (SCC) on charges of violating the Anti-Cyber Crime Law for tweeting hashtags in support of women's rights and posting photos on Snapchat of herself at the mall wearing "immodest" clothing. Shortly before her family lost contact with her, she told them that she had been beaten violently by a fellow prisoner.

According to court documents, Manahel al-Otaibi was charged with "publishing and spreading content that contains committing public sins and inciting individuals and girls in society to renounce religious principles and social values and to violate public order and public morals on her Twitter account", in violation of the Anti-Cybercrime Law. The charges against her are based on her social media posts which were "opposed to regulations and laws that relate to women", including through calling to #EndMaleGuardianship. The prosecutor also referred to reports from 2018 and 2019 by the Committee for the Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice, also known as the religious police, who accused her of tarnishing the reputation of the Kingdom and going to the mall without wearing an abaya, promoting the removal of the hijab and posting photos of that outing on Snapchat.

I urge you to order the immediate and unconditional release of Manahel al-Otaibi, as she is being held solely for peacefully exercising her right to freedom of expression. Meanwhile the authorities must reveal her whereabouts to her family. I also call on you to stop using the SCC to systematically silence human rights activism and freedom of expression and to repeal or substantially amend the counterterrorism and anti-cybercrime laws which criminalize peaceful dissent and enact new laws that are fully compatible with international human rights law.

Yours sincerely,