

Waleed Mohammed Al Smani
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Your Excellency,

I am distressed to learn that after a period more than five months of enforced disappearance, Manahel al-Otaibi called her family to inform them that she is being held in solitary confinement in al-Malaz Prison with a broken leg after being brutally beaten, and without access to medical care. Saudi authorities forcibly disappeared the 29-year-old fitness instructor between 5 November 2023 and 14 April 2024. Before her enforced disappearance, she had already been detained for a year since 16 November 2022 and charged with 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. She awaits trial before the Specialized Criminal Court (SCC), a court set up to try terrorism-related crimes.

Shortly before her family lost contact with her on 5 November 2023, Manahel al-Otaibi told them that she had been beaten violently by a fellow prisoner. Manahel al-Otaibi told her family in a brief phone call sounding distressed on 14 April that she had been subjected to further brutal beatings by another person, who she was unable to identify as a prisoner or a guard, and she believes her solitary confinement is in retaliation for her sister Fawzia al-Otaibi's campaigning to release her from prison. Her sister Fawzia al-Otaibi told Amnesty International that she believes the only reason Manahel al-Otaibi was finally permitted a phone call was in order to convey a message to her family to stop being publicly outspoken about her imprisonment. Her family alleged that Manahel al-Otaibi spent "months" in solitary confinement, based on information provided to them by former detainees who had been held in the same prison. Prolonged solitary confinement for more than 15 days is a violation of the absolute prohibition of torture and other cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment.

According to court documents reviewed by Amnesty International, 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. Pending her release, she must be granted immediate access to medical care, and her allegations of torture and other ill-treatment must be impartially investigated.

Yours sincerely,