Salma, a 34-year-old mother of two children, was arrested on 15 January 2021 while on holiday in Saudi Arabia, and subjected to solitary confinement and lengthy sessions of questioning over a period of nine and a half months before being brought before the Specialised Criminal Court (SCC), a court used as an instrument of repression to silence dissent in the kingdom. She belongs to the country’s Shi’a Muslim minority, who have long suffered from the government’s repression.

She was sentenced under Saudi Arabia’s draconian Counter-Terrorism Law, facing charges including of publishing tweets “that disrupt the public order”, in connection with posts on her account (@I_Salma1988) where she expressed support for Saudi prisoners of conscience such as women’s rights activist Loujain al-Hathloul.

Initially handed a six-year sentence in March 2022, Salma’s sentence was increased to a shocking 34 years in August 2022 during the appeal process, one of the longest known prison sentences handed down against a peaceful activist for their free speech in Saudi Arabia. It was reduced to 27 years in January 2023 following retrial, highlighting the farcical nature of the Saudi court system; her case is currently pending before the Supreme Court.
Take action:

The Saudi authorities are susceptible to international pressure, which when applied sufficiently and in coordinated fashion can lead to human rights victories on the ground, such as the release of prisoners of conscience. Conversely, when outside pressure is relaxed, the Saudi leadership reverts to its repressive ways with a sense of impunity.

There has been significant support for Salma so far, including among trade unions; both the UCU General Secretary and UCU branch at the University of Leeds have condemned her sentence and called for her release. However, further support is needed. Here are some ways that you can help push for Salma’s release:

1- Tweet
Salma was sentenced for peacefully tweeting in support of prisoners of conscience. You can tweet in solidarity with her, using the hashtag #FreeSalma.

2- Sign the petition
A petition is live via change.org, calling for Salma’s release.

3- Write to your local MP
Salma was a resident and student in the United Kingdom, and so the UK government, a close ally of Saudi Arabia, has a responsibility and the leverage with which to help secure Salma’s release. You can write to your local MP to encourage them to call on the government to take action.