



Salma al-Shehab

Women's rights activist

Date of birth:

9 November 1988

Profession:

Salma is a dental hygienist and PhD student at the University of Leeds in the United Kingdom, where she was residing before her detention.



Status:

Serving a 27-year sentence



Date of arrest:

15 January 2021



Date of sentencing:

25 January 2023



Sentence:

27 years in prison, plus a 27-year travel ban



Further case background



Case notes:

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.



Summary of judicial proceedings:

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, academics and the wider public; 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.



Sample tweets here



2- Sign the petition

A [petition](#) is live via Global Citizen, calling for Salma's release.



Sign it here



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.



Sample MP letter