



The Honorable John F. Kerry  
Secretary of State  
US Department of State  
2201 C Street NW  
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Kerry,

We write to you in regards to Sheikh Nimr Baqir al-Nimr, an imprisoned political activist and Shia Muslim religious scholar in Saudi Arabia, whom we fear is at imminent risk of execution. On 24 October 2015, the family of Sheikh al-Nimr discovered that the Supreme Court has upheld the cleric's death sentence and has sent his case to the Ministry of Interior for implementation of the sentence. We ask that you publicly call on King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud to stay Sheikh al-Nimr's execution, drop all charges against him that are based solely on his peaceful criticism of the Saudi Arabian authorities, and order a new trial that guarantees him a fair hearing.

During his detention and trial, the Saudi Arabian authorities repeatedly violated Sheikh al-Nimr's due process rights. Security forces violently arrested the then-53-year-old cleric in July 2012, shooting him multiple times. After holding Sheikh al-Nimr for months without charge, the authorities brought him to trial before the Specialized Criminal Court, the kingdom's anti-terrorism tribunal. The cleric's trial was grossly unfair. The judge prevented him from adequately preparing his defense, meeting with his lawyer, and exercising his right to cross-examine witnesses – specifically his arresting officers, who did not testify in open court but whose written testimony the judge deemed admissible as evidence against the cleric. During this time period, the Saudi Arabian authorities denied Sheikh al-Nimr access to adequate medical care, failing to properly treat his paralyzed right leg and remove a bullet from his body until February 2015.

On 15 October 2014, the Specialized Criminal Court sentenced Sheikh Nimr al-Nimr to death on a number of vague charges, including "disobeying and breaking allegiance to the ruler," "calling to overthrow the regime," "calling for demonstrations," "inciting sectarian strife," "questioning the integrity of the judiciary," "meeting with and supporting wanted suspects," and "interfering in a neighboring state's affairs" (in reference to Bahrain). Some of these should not be offenses at all, because they criminalize the peaceful exercise of human rights; and others violate the principle of legality in international law as they are vague and broad.

Sheikh Nimr al-Nimr is one of at least four Saudi Arabian Shia Muslims who were sentenced to death by the Specialized Criminal Court, and whose death sentences the Supreme Court has recently upheld. Three others, Ali al-Nimr, Dawood al-Marhoon, and Abdullah al-Zaher, all participated in protests and were juveniles at the time of their arrest. They were also sentenced to death after grossly unfair trials and based on "confessions" which they state were extracted under torture. Ali al-Nimr is the nephew of Sheikh Nimr al-Nimr.

The family of Sheikh al-Nimr, local activists, and community members have expressed their grave concern that Sheikh al-Nimr's execution may cause upheaval in Saudi Arabia's Eastern Province, [whose Shia residents have suffered economic and political marginalization for decades.](#)

In light of these concerns, we urge you to leverage your close relationship with King Salman to press him to grant Sheikh al-Nimr access to any medical attention that he requires, commute his death sentence, as well as those of Ali al-Nimr, Dawood al-Marhoon, and Abdullah al-Zaher, and order a fair trial for each of them.

Sincerely,

**Americans for Democracy & Human Rights in Bahrain (ADHRB)**

**Amnesty International**

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**Bahrain Institute for Rights and Democracy (BIRD)**

**Center for Inquiry (CFI)**

**European Centre for Democracy & Human Rights (ECDHR)**

**European Saudi Organisation for Human Rights (ESOHR)**

**Freedom House**

**Human Rights Foundation**

**Human Rights Watch**

**Hindu American Foundation (HAF)**

**International Institute for Religious Freedom (IIRF)**

**Monitor of Human Rights in Saudi Arabia (MHRSA)**

**Muslim Public Affairs Council**

**PEN American Center**

**Project on Middle East Democracy (POMED)**

**Shia Rights Watch (SRW)**

**Dr. Toby Matthiesen**

*Senior Research Fellow in International Relations of the Middle East at the University of Oxford*

**William C. Walsh**

*Partner, Bisceglie and Walsh*