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COMMUNIQUE DE PRESSE - COMUNICADO DE PRENSA

SAUDI ARABIA: ICJ CALLS ON SAUDI AUTHORITIES TO CEASE HARASSEMENT OF HUMAN RIGHTS LAWYERS AND DEFENDERS

For immediate release

19 February, 2007

"Ten Saudis, most of them human rights defenders and advocates who have been arbitrarily arrested in Jeddah and Madinah on 2 February and are being held incommunicado, must be released immediately or legally charged with a recognisable offence," said the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ) today.

An Interior Ministry official told local newspapers that the arrested men had been involved in collecting money to finance terrorism. The ICJ believes, however, that there is sufficient evidence to show that they may have been arrested in relation to their peaceful activities in defence of human rights and their continued call for more constitutional reforms and separation of powers in Saudi Arabia. Two of them, Sulieman al-Rushudi and Al-Sharif Saif Al-Ghalib, were detained in March 2004 because they signed a petition calling for changes to the system of government.

The detainees are reportedly being held in the offices of the General Intelligence Service, do not have legal representation and are not allowed to communicate with their families. "Unless the Saudi authorities charge them with a recognisable criminal offence and bring them before an independent and impartial tribunal, they must be immediately released," said Mr. Nicholas Howen, Secretary General of the ICJ. "The grounds for their detention must be urgently made public, and they must be allowed to communicate with their lawyers."

The ICJ urges the Saudi authorities to respect its Criminal Procedure Code, which gives the arrested person the right to be promptly notified of the reasons for their arrest or detention. The ICJ calls upon the Saudi authorities to ensure that all the detainees are protected from torture and other ill-treatment, and given regular access to their families, their lawyers and any medical attention they may require.

The ICJ expresses its deep concern at the deterioration of the human rights situation in Saudi Arabia and the continuing targeting of human rights defenders. "We call for the release of all human rights defenders detained without charges," said Mr. Howen. "Saudi Arabia is a member of the United Nations Human Rights Council. We call on the government to stop these practices, which disregard basic principles of human rights law that all members of the Council should uphold."

For more information, please contact Saïd Benarbia, Middle East & North Africa Legal Officer, at 00 41 22 979 38 17

The ICJ is an international non-governmental organisation comprising sixty of the world's most eminent jurists and has a worldwide network of national sections and affiliated organisations

33, rue des Bains, P.O. Box 91, 1211 Geneva 8, Switzerland
Tel: +41(0) 22 979 3800 – Fax: +41(0) 22 979 3801 – Website: <http://www.icj.org> – E-mail: info@icj.org

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