

Network of Concerned Historians				NCH
Campaigns				
Year original	Year follow-up	Circular	Country	Name
2018		91	Saudi Arabia	Hatoon Al-Fassi
	2018			

Announcement

Here is a second appeal for Hatoon Al-Fassi, an associate professor of women's history in Saudi Arabia, who has been detained between 21 and 24 June 2018, apparently because of her women's rights activism, including her leadership in the movement to lift the ban on women driving. (The first appeal can be found [here](#) or [here](#)).

The letter below was sent on her behalf to the king and crown prince of Saudi Arabia on 6 November 2018, with 45 signatures. The Committee on Academic Freedom of the Middle East Association intends to resend the letter when it has 150 signatures.

Please consider signing. To do so, send an email stating your wish to sign, with your full name and affiliation (as it should appear in the letter) to Prof. Miriam Lowi: [**miriam.lowi@gmail.com**](mailto:miriam.lowi@gmail.com)

Thank you very much and with best wishes,

Antoon De Baets

(Network of Concerned Historians)

His Majesty King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud
King of Saudi Arabia and Custodian of the two Holy Mosques

His Royal Highness Prince Mohammad bin Salman Al Saud
Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia

November 6, 2018

Your Majesty, Your Royal Highness:

It is more than five months that Dr. Hatoon Ajwad al-Fassi, world-renowned Saudi scholar, professor, writer and women's rights advocate has been in detention in Saudi Arabia. Her arrest, on 21 June, coincided with the lifting of the ban on women's driving in the kingdom. We are very concerned about Dr. al-Fassi. Furthermore, her arrest and that of other women's rights advocates provide evidence of the deeply troubling turn in what has been publicized as a reformist, modernizing agenda.

Until recently, Dr. al-Fassi was Associate Professor of Women's History at King Saud University in Riyadh where she had been a faculty member since 1992. She is the author of two important books -- *Sanawat fi 'Umr Al-Mar'ah Al-Saudiyyah [Years in the Lives of Saudi Women]* (2018) and *Women in Pre-Islamic Arabia: Nabataea* (2007), and numerous articles and book chapters on the lives and status of women in the Arabian Peninsula, in the ancient world as well as in the contemporary period. A highly-respected historian of international stature, she has received numerous honors and accolades, among them, induction in 2008 into the prestigious "*Ordre des Palmes Académiques*" - a French order of knighthood for distinguished academics and figures in the world of education and culture. Alongside her scholarship, Dr. al-Fassi has written since 1993 a widely-read, weekly column on contemporary social affairs in *al-Riyadh* newspaper.

Dr. al-Fassi is, as well, a prominent advocate for women's rights. In Saudi Arabia, she was engaged, for years, in efforts to lift the ban on women driving. She was also involved in initiatives to allow and encourage women's full participation in municipal elections, and she co-founded the "*Baladi*" campaign to empower women who wanted to participate. In addition, she led the campaign to include women in the *Majlis al-Shura* (Consultative Assembly) in Saudi Arabia. That campaign resulted in the appointment in 2013, for the first time, of thirty women members. In 1993, she founded the Sunday Forum, a monthly

gathering of women with lectures on a wide range of issues; the Forum continues to convene and remains an important resource for women.

Dr. al-Fassi has done much to enhance the lives of women and she has done so with wisdom, dedication, dignity and altruism. She enjoys an enormous and devoted following, not only in the Gulf region, but throughout the Middle East and North Africa, as well as in Asia, Europe and North America. She is, indeed, one of the best known and most respected of Middle Eastern women scholars and rights advocates.

In the weeks leading up to the much-anticipated lifting of the ban on women driving on 24 June, a reported sixteen advocates for women's rights were detained in the Kingdom; and since the lifting of the ban, several more women have been detained. At a time when the Saudi leadership seeks to present an image of itself as engaged in a program of progressive change, these arrests undermine that program by demonstrating a disconnect between stated policy and practice.

We call upon the Saudi government, at this historic moment, to release Dr. Hatoon Ajwad al-Fassi and other women's rights advocates who remain in detention. Dr. al-Fassi should be allowed to continue her most valuable work as scholar, writer, mentor and advocate for the greater good of her country, her fellow citizens, and women throughout the region and the world.

Sincerely,

Khaled Abou El-Fadl, Omar and Azmeralda Alfi Distinguished Professor of Law, University of California, Los Angeles School of Law

Chowdhury Rafqul Abrar, Professor of International Relations, University of Dhaka, Bangladesh

Susan Abulhawa, novelist

Lila Abu-Lughod, Professor, Institute for Research on Women, Gender and Sexuality, Columbia University

Karen Abu Zayd, Commissioner, Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, United Nations Human Rights Council

Imad-ad-Dean Ahmad, Minaret of Freedom Institute, Maryland, USA

Rafiah Altalei, member: International Press Institute, Vienna

Jacqueline Armijo, Associate Professor of the Humanities, Asian University for Women, Chittagong, Bangladesh

Zainah Anwar, Executive Director, Musawah

Talal Asad, Professor of Anthropology, The Graduate Center, City University of New York

Elsa Roberts Auerbach, Professor Emerita, University of Massachusetts Boston

Sabrina Azraq, Projects Coordinator, Canadian Council of Muslim Women (CCMW)

Margot Badran, Georgetown University

Uendra Baxi, Emeritus Professor of Law, University of Warwick, UK and Delhi, India

Distinguished Professor of Law, National Law University of Delhi

Anna Bigelow, Associate Professor of Religious Studies, North Carolina State University
Akeel Bilgrami, Sidney Morgenbesser Professor of Philosophy, Columbia University
Carolina Bracco, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Buenos Aires, Argentina
Victoria Brittain, journalist and author
Judith Butler, Maxine Elliot Professor of Comparative Literature, University of California, Berkeley
Charles E. Butterworth, Emeritus Professor, Department of Government & Politics, University of Maryland, USA
Juan Cole, Professor, University of Michigan, USA
Noam Chomsky, Institute Professor Emeritus, Dept. of Linguistics and Philosophy, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, USA
Helena Cobban, Executive President, Just World Educational
Sandra McGee Deutsch, University of Texas at El Paso, USA
Michele Dunne, Senior Fellow and Director, Middle East Program, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, USA
Pepe Escobar, Correspondent-at-Large, Asia Times, Hong Kong
John L. Esposito, University Professor and Founding Director of the Prince Alwaleed Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding, Georgetown University, USA
Mohammad Fadel, Professor of Law, University of Toronto Faculty of Law, Canada
Richard Falk, Albert G. Milbank Professor Emeritus of International Law, Princeton University
Erica Ferg, Assistant Professor, Regis University, USA
Maribel Fierro, Research Professor, Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, Spain
Melissa Finn, Adjunct Professor, Wilfrid Laurier University, Canada
Irene Gendzier, Professor Emeritus, Boston University
Zareena Grewal, Associate Professor, American Studies & Religious Studies, Yale University
Nahla Haidar el Addal, member: United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)
Abdellah Hammoudi, Professor Emeritus, Dept. of Anthropology, Princeton University
Bahey eldin Hassan, Director, Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies, Egypt
Amy Hawthorne, Deputy Director for Research, Project on Middle East Democracy, USA
Homa Hoodfar, Professor of Anthropology, Emerita, Concordia University, Montreal, Canada
Islah Jad, Associate Professor, Gender and Cultural Studies, Bir Zeit University, Palestine
Faisal Javaid, Assistant Professor, Department of International Relations, Federal Urdu University, Pakistan
Huda Jawad, Trustee, Ending Violence against Women Coalition, U.K.
Nadia Jones-Gailani, Department of Gender Studies, Central European University, Hungary
Suad Joseph, Distinguished Research Professor of Anthropology and Gender, Sexuality and Women's Studies, University of California, Davis, USA
Dietrich Jung, Professor and Head of the Centre for Contemporary Middle East Studies, University of Southern Denmark
Louis Kampf, Prof. Emeritus of Humanities, Massachusetts Institute of Technology
Deniz Kandiyoti, Emeritus Professor, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, UK
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Rami Khouri, Adjunct Professor of Journalism and Journalist-in-Residence, Media Studies Program, American University of Beirut, Lebanon
Asma Lamrabet, doctor and writer, Morocco
Clara E. Lida, Centro de Estudios Históricos, El Colegio de México, Mexico City
Summer Lopez, Senior Director of Free Expression Programs, PEN America

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Shaista Gohir OBE, Muslim Women's Network, U.K.
Stuart Rees OAM, Professor Emeritus, University of Sydney, Australia
Jennifer Olmsted, Professor, Drew University, USA
Muneerah Razak, Research Associate, National University of Singapore
Sara Roy, Senior Research Scholar, Center for Middle Eastern Studies, Harvard University, USA
Farian Sabahi, lecturer, Università della Valle d'Aosta, Italy
Saskia Sassen, Robert S. Lynd Professor of Sociology, Columbia University, USA & Centennial visiting
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Brigitte H. Schulz, Professor emerita, Trinity College, USA
Rachel Scott, Associate Professor of Islamic Studies, Virginia Tech, USA
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