

Network of Concerned Historians				NCH
Campaigns				
Year original	Year follow-up	Circular	Country	Name
2018		91	Saudi Arabia	Hatoon Al-Fassi
	2018			
	2019			

Announcement

Here is a third appeal for historian Hatoon Al-Fassi, an associate professor of women’s history in Saudi Arabia, who has been detained one year ago, on 24 June 2018, because of her women’s rights activism, including her leadership in the movement to lift the ban on women driving. (The first two appeals can be found [here](#)).

Although Hatoon Al-Fassi was temporarily released on 2 May 2019, Scholars at Risk urges Saudi authorities to drop any charges against her and other women’s rights activists, to ensure their well-being while in temporarily release, and to conduct an independent investigation into allegations of torture during detention.

**** If you want to sign a Scholars at Risk letter, please go to “fast action” [here](#).**

**** If you want to send a hard copy letter, download the Scholars at Risk template letter [here](#).**

**** If you want to read a NCH summary of the case, please see below.**

NCH Summary of the Case of Hatoon Al-Fassi

On 24 June 2018, in the lead-up to the lifting of the driving ban, **Hatoon Al-Fassi**, an associate professor of women’s history at King Saud University, Riyadh, human rights activist, and contributor to al-Riyadh newspaper, was detained in apparent relation to her women’s rights activism, including her leadership in the movement to lift the ban on women driving. A few days earlier, on 19 June 2018, Al-Fassi had been put under a travel ban. The detailed circumstances surrounding her arrest remained unclear. Since her detention, she has not been granted access to her lawyer or family and no information has been given about her whereabouts. Since November 2018, Al-Fassi and nine other women’s rights activists have reportedly been subjected to

torture by electrocution and flogging, sexual harassment, and sexual assault.

On 13 March 2019, Al-Fassi and nine other women's rights activists appeared in a criminal court in a closed-door trial for the first time since their arrest. Saudi Arabia did not make the charges public; however, reports indicate that the ten women are being tried on charges for allegedly communicating with international organizations and foreign media and promoting women's rights. On 27 March 2019, following the second hearing, the court released three of the activists. On 3 April 2019, the remaining activists, including Al-Fassi, appeared in court and were apparently denied bail. On 2 May 2019, Al-Fassi and three other women's rights activists were temporarily released.

Al-Fassi was the author of *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 women's history in the Arabian Peninsula. As a human rights activist, she was engaged in efforts to lift the ban on women driving. She was involved in initiatives to allow women's full participation in municipal elections, co-founding the "Baladi" campaign to empower women who wanted to participate. She led the campaign to include women in the Majlis al-Shura (Consultative Assembly) in Saudi Arabia, resulting 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. On 17 November 2018, the Middle East Studies Association of North America awarded al-Fassi the MESA Academic Freedom Award for 2018.

Sources: Scholars at Risk, "[Dr. Hatoon Al-Fassi Detained Over Women's Rights Activism](#)" (19 July 2018); American Historical Association, "[Letter to King Salman bin Abdulazziz al-Saud](#)" (Washington, 4 September 2018); Scholars at Risk, *Free to Think: Report of the Scholars at Risk Academic Freedom Monitoring Project* (New York: SAR, 2018), 17; Various academics, Letter to King Salman and Prince Mohammad bin Salman (6 November 2018); Human Rights Watch, "[Saudi Arabia: Detained Women Reported Tortured](#)," (20 November 2018); [MESA Academic Freedom Award: Hatoon al Fassi, 2018 Recipient](#) (16 November 2018); United Nations Special Procedures, [Letter about Saudi-Arabian Human Rights Defenders](#) (UA SAU 11/2018; 10 October 2018); "[Saudi Arabia Temporarily Frees Four Women Activists](#)," *BBC News* (3 May 2019); Scholars at Risk, "[Hatoon Al-Fassi, Saudi Arabia](#)" (24 June 2019); Scholars at Risk, "[Letter to His Majesty King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud](#)" (25 June 2019).