

His Excellency Shaykh Dr Mohammed bin Abdulkareem Al-Issa
Ministry of Justice,
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Riyadh 11137 Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
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27 November 2015

Your Excellency,

RE: Palestinian poet Ashraf Fayadh

We, the undersigned organisations, all dedicated to the value of creative freedom, are writing to express our grave concern that Ashraf Fayadh has been sentenced to death for apostasy.

Ashraf Fayadh, a poet, artist, curator, and member of British-Saudi art organisation [Edge of Arabia](#), was first detained in August 2013 in relation to his collection of poems *Instructions Within* following the submission of a complaint to the Saudi Committee for the Promotion of Virtue. He was released on bail but rearrested in January 2014.

According to court documents, in May 2014 the General Court of Abha found proof that Fayadh had committed apostasy (ridda) but had repented for it. The charge of apostasy was dropped, but he was nevertheless sentenced to four years in prison and 800 lashes in relation to numerous charges related to blasphemy.

At Ashraf Fayadh's retrial in November 2015 the judge reversed the previous ruling, declaring that repentance was not enough to avoid the death penalty. We believe that all charges against him should have been dropped entirely, and are appalled that Fayadh has instead been sentenced to death for apostasy, simply for exercising his rights to freedom of expression and freedom of belief.

As a member of the UN Human Rights Council (HRC), the pre-eminent intergovernmental body tasked with protecting and promoting human rights, and the Chair of the HRC's Consultative Group, Saudi Arabia purports to uphold and respect the highest standards of human rights. However the decision of the court is a clear violation of the internationally recognised rights to freedom of conscience and expression. Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) states that, '[e]veryone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief'. Furthermore, under Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, '[e]veryone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas

through any media and regardless of frontiers'. Saudi Arabia is therefore in absolute contravention of the rights that as a member of the UN HRC it has committed to protect.

There are also widespread concerns over an apparent lack of due process in the trial: Fayadh was denied legal representation, reportedly as a result of his ID having been confiscated following his arrest in January 2014. It is our understanding that Fayadh has 30 days to appeal this latest ruling, and we urge the authorities to allow him access to the lawyer of his choice.

We call on the Saudi authorities to release Ashraf Fayadh and others detained in Saudi Arabia in violation of their right to freedom of expression immediately and unconditionally.

AICA (International Association of Art Critics)

Algerian PEN

All-India PEN

Amnesty International UK

Arterial Network

ARTICLE 19

Artists for Palestine UK

Austrian PEN

Banipal

Bangladesh PEN

Bread and Roses TV

British Humanist Association

Bulgarian PEN

Centre for Secular Space

CIMAM (International Committee for Museums and Collections of Modern Art)

Council of Ex-Muslims of Britain

Croatian PEN

Crossway Foundation

Danish PEN

English PEN

Ethiopian PEN-in-Exile

FIDH (International Federation for Human Rights)

Five Leaves Publications

Freemuse

German PEN

Haitian PEN

Human Rights Watch

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International Humanist and Ethical Union

Iranian PEN in Exile

Jimmy Wales Foundation

Lebanese PEN

Ledbury Poetry Festival

Lithuanian PEN

Modern Poetry in Translation

National Coalition Against Censorship (NCAC)

Norwegian PEN

One Darnley Road

One Law for All

Palestinian PEN

PEN American Center

PEN Canada

PEN International

PEN South Africa

Peruvian PEN

Peter Tatchell Foundation

Portuguese PEN

Québec PEN

Russian PEN

San Miguel PEN

Scottish PEN

Slovene PEN

Society of Authors

South African PEN

Split This Rock

Suisse Romand PEN

School of Literature, Drama and Creative Writing, University of East Anglia

The Voice Project

Trieste PEN

Turkish PEN

Wales PEN Cymru