

Rt Hon Philip Hammond MP  
Foreign and Commonwealth Office  
King Charles Street  
London  
SW1A 2AH

27 November 2015

Dear Mr Hammond

We, the undersigned organisations, are writing to express our grave concern that Ashraf Fayadh has been sentenced to death for apostasy, and to urge the British government to intervene on his behalf as a matter of urgency.

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. We are urging the Saudi authorities to allow him access to the lawyer of his choice.

We urge the British government to raise Fayadh's case with the Saudi authorities at the earliest opportunity and ask that you call for his immediate release, as you successfully did in the case of Brit Karl Andree last month. We also continue to urge the British government to call for the immediate release of others detained in violation of their right to freedom of expression in Saudi Arabia, including liberal blogger Raif Badawi, currently serving 10 years in prison and facing a further 950 lashes, and his lawyer and brother-in-law Waleed Abulkhair, serving a 15-year prison sentence.

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Artists for Palestine UK

Banipal

Bread and Roses TV

British Humanist Association

Council of Ex-Muslims of Britain

Crossway Foundation

Edge of Arabia

English PEN

FIDH (International Federation for Human Rights)

Five Leaves Publications

Human Rights Watch

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Jimmy Wales Foundation

Ledbury Poetry Festival

Modern Poetry in Translation

One Darnley Road

One Law for All

PEN International

Peter Tatchell Foundation

Scottish PEN

Society of Authors

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

Wales PEN Cymru