Saudi Arabia may execute female human rights activist

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<http://www.foxnews.com/world/2018/08/22/saudi-arabia-may-execute-female-human-rights-activist.html>

Saudi Arabian prosecutors were seeking the death penalty for a human rights activist who may be the first woman in the country's history to face execution over her cause, human rights campaigners said.

Israa al-Ghomgham, 29, was arrested in 2015 for participating in anti-government protests and endorsing human rights on social media websites, Human Rights Watch said. At the time, she had been demonstrating to call for an end to anti-Shia discrimination in a majority-Sunni country. Both she and her husband were arrested, [NBC News](https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/saudi-arabia-seeks-unprecedented-death-penalty-woman-activist-n902771) reported.

Al-Ghomgham has been imprisoned since then and faces charges related to peaceful activism, [Human Rights Watch](https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/08/21/saudi-prosecution-seeks-death-penalty-female-activist) said.

“Any execution is appalling, but seeking the death penalty for activists like Israa al-Ghomgham, who are not even accused of violent behavior, is monstrous,” Sarah Leah Whitson, executive director of Human Rights Watch's Middle East and North Africa Division, said.

HRW, citing Saudi activists, said al-Ghomgham is the first woman to “possibly face the death penalty for activism for her human-rights related work.” Many campaigners also fear it would set a "dangerous precedent" in the country. [The Guardian](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/aug/22/saudi-arabia-seeks-its-first-death-penalty-against-a-female-human-rights-activist) noted that the country has “one of the world’s highest rates of execution” and has killed women before.

Al-Ghomgham is slated to appear in court on Oct. 28, when a judge will confirm or reverse prosecutors’ request for the death penalty, reports said.

Mohammed bin Salman, the crown prince of Saudi Arabia, has been shaking up the country since coming into power. The 32-year-old is pushing to modernize the conservative Islamic state, such as allowing women to drive for the first time and reopening movie theaters again after 35 years.

The Guardian noted the trial could cast a shadow on the crown prince despite his efforts.

Earlier this month, Saudi Arabia expelled Canadian Ambassador Dennis Horak and ordered Saudi citizens studying in Canada to leave the country, citing critics of the Saudi regime's arrests of human rights activists.

Despite the tension between Canada and Saudi Arabia, the U.S. and Saudi Arabia have a close relationship after President Trump said he wanted to rebuild relationships with the kingdom.