



Osama Khalid

Wikipedian

Date of birth:

19 January 1994

Occupation:

Medical doctor, blogger, and
Wikipedia administrator



Status:

Detained in al-Ha'ir Prison, Riyadh



Date of arrest:

July 2020



Date of latest sentencing:

2 September 2025



Current sentence:

14 years in prison



Biography:

A self-described “enthusiast about digital liberties and human rights,” Osama Khalid is a well-known public-facing activist for internet freedom in Saudi Arabia. One friend described him as “a person of kindness and gentleness”.

Khalid graduated in medicine from King Saud bin Abdulaziz College of Health Sciences and worked as a pediatrician. Alongside his studies and professional work, he pursued his passion for information technology. Among many voluntary activities, in 2013 he founded a computer club in Riyadh to promote digital literacy, and while at university he established and managed a student-run online cloud platform for sharing medical knowledge.

Khalid was also an active blogger, translator, and editor. As early as 2006, he contributed to Wikipedia posts in Arabic and later became a prolific publisher and administrator. In this role, he authored and translated articles on a wide range of subjects, and attended several Wikipedia conferences.

In addition, he was active on Twitter and maintained his own blog, where he advocated against censorship and in support of human rights and freedoms, especially online. Both the account and the website were later shut down.



Further case
background



Case notes:

In July 2020, Khalid was arrested alongside his colleague Ziyad al-Sufyani (a podiatrist and fellow Wikipedian). Khalid is currently imprisoned in al-Ha'ir – a prison in Riyadh infamous for its abysmal conditions and reports of torture of inmates, the Wikipedia article on which Khalid started in 2012.

Khalid and al-Sufyani's crimes, in the eyes of the state, were simply sharing information online that conflicted with official narratives. As Wikipedia editors, they had contributed to pages on critical human rights issues such as the treatment of women's rights activists Loujain al-Hathoul (herself imprisoned in al-Ha'ir from 2018 to 2021) and Manal al-Sharif. Khalid had also authored an article criticising government plans for the surveillance of encrypted digital communication platforms in 2013. As a wave of arbitrary arrests of dissidents and activists swept Saudi Arabia in the summer of the 2020 Covid-19 lockdown, activities like these made Khalid a target of the Saudi authorities.



Summary of judicial proceedings:

The opaqueness of the Saudi judicial system, and the climate of fear surrounding it, meant that although he had been arrested two years previously, knowledge of Khalid's imprisonment did not come to international attention until he was sentenced in mid-2022. Denied legal counsel and kept in solitary confinement during his initial questioning, he was tried in the Specialised Criminal Court (SCC) – an exceptional jurisdiction set up in 2008 to try cases of terrorism but used as a means of targeting critics of the Saudi authorities. The court's activities are opaque and observers are denied access to hearings.

Khalid was initially sentenced to a five-year jail term, but this was increased on appeal to 32 years. His sentence was reduced in 2023 to 25 years and again, in September 2025, to 14. This huge discrepancy between sentences handed down at different stages in the case underscores the arbitrary manner in which sentencing is carried out in the Saudi judicial system. Khalid is not due to be released until 2034, by which time he will be 40 years old. His colleague Ziyad al-Sufyani was sentenced to an eight-year jail term, but was released in March 2025 during an unexplained wave of prisoner releases.