

Wednesday, January 2, 2008

Free Fouad al-Farhan

This video covers the detention of some Saudi dissidents, including blogger Fouad al-Farhan. The Internet and blogosphere are quite the challenge to repressive governments. Before the days of the Internet, government censors could be very efficient squelching expression by banning periodicals, refusing publication permits and access to newspaper and newsprint, and seizing publication equipment and offices. Today, people can blog from any Internet-attached computer, which renders rather meaningless a governmental seizure of a blogger's computer. Now more unable to censor bloggers through pre-publication limits, government censors may turn more often to such post-publication sanctions as arrests, civil and criminal court lawsuits, and elimination of the allegedly offending URL. The Committee to Protect Bloggers covers some of this post-publication repression. Saudi blogger Fouad al-Farhan was arrested December 10, and remains detained, after blogging in favor of more civil liberties in Saudi Arabia and against recent political detentions there. Mr. al-Farhan's arrest is not surprising, but still should be opposed. Pleasantly surprising, though, is that his blog remains available and active to this day; I figure the server for his blog is located outside Saudi Arabia, and that this was intended by Mr. al-Farhan. In late December 2007, Mr. al-Farhan's supporters set up a bilingual Arabic-English blog to support his release. More about Mr. al-Farhan's plight is here. Although his supporters' website does not seem to provide suggestions on how to help, I suppose a good start is to visit his supporters' blog, so that Saudi authorities will see the site's visitor statistics shown on the lower right section of the page. I also suggest sending respectfully but firmly-worded letters and e-mails to your country's ambassador from Saudi Arabia and to King Abdullah (who, for instance, last week reversed a harsh court sentence against a rape victim -- see the December 17 Underdog blog) urging Mr. al-Farhan's immediate release, and the end to harassment for his stating his political views on his blog and elsewhere. Here are some addresses for appealing to the Saudi government for Mr. al-Farhan's release: King Abdullah, c/o Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Nasseriya Street, Riyadh 11124, Tel: 406 7777 / 441 6836, Fax: 403 0159. You might also contact the Saudi ambassador to your country. The contact information in the United States is: Prince Bandar bin Sultan bin Abdulaziz Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia 601 New Hampshire Avenue, NW Washington, DC 20037 Main Number: (202) 342-3800 Information/Press Office: (202) 337-4076 e-mail: info@saudiembassy.net. Free Fouad al-Farhan. Jon Katz.

Posted by Jon Katz in Jon's news & views at 00:00