

Saudis free one of nine reformists

Agence France-Presse - 22 September, 2007

Saudi Arabia has freed reformist lawyer Issam Basrawi, one of nine advocates of an Islam-based constitutional monarchy held without trial for more than seven months, a fellow activist said on Friday.

Basrawi, who is in his late sixties, was released late on Thursday, Khaled al-Omair told AFP by telephone from Riyadh.

His release came one week after activists said they had petitioned King Abdullah calling for all nine reformists to be freed.

"We hope this is a good omen and that the others will also be released," Omair said.

Basrawi could not be immediately reached for comment, but Omair said the lawyer had been released from a hospital in the Red Sea city of Jeddah where he was being treated.

The petition signed by 135 activists urged the king to free the nine men or to ensure that they get a public trial.

The interior ministry attributed the arrests in early February to their alleged involvement in terror funding, but the petition said the nine had been mulling the formation of an Islamic political party.

Political parties are banned in Saudi Arabia, which has no elected legislature --only a consultative council appointed by the monarch.

The petition accused the interior ministry of seeking to discredit the reformists by associating them with terrorism.

Two other lawyers -- Suleiman al-Rushoodi and Mussa al-Qarni -- are among the eight still being held.

The others in the group are Abdul Rahman al-Shemairi, Abdul Aziz al-Kheraiji, Saifeddin Faisal al-Sharif, Fahd al-Qarshi, Saud al-Hashemi and Abdul Rahman Khan.