

WEEKLY ENGLISH PRACTICE

27 YEARS IN PRISON FOR RE-TWEETING

Coach John talks about a Saudi woman serving 27 years in prison for re-tweeting in favour of free speech



Saudi prisoner Salma al-Shehab, is currently serving 27 years in prison solely for the ‘crime’ of posting tweets in support of Saudi prisoners of conscience.

Salma al-Shehab, a 34-year-old mother of two children and Leeds University **PhD** student, was arrested on 15 January 2021 while on holiday in Saudi Arabia, and subjected to solitary confinement and lengthy sessions of questioning over a period of nine and a half months before being brought before the Specialised Criminal Court (SCC), a court used as an instrument of repression to silence **dissent** in the kingdom.

She belongs to the country’s **Shi’a** Muslim minority, who have long suffered from the government’s repression. Salma was sentenced to 27 years in prison under the **draconian** Counter-Terrorism Law, for posting tweets in support of Saudi prisoners of conscience such as women’s rights activist Loujain al-Hathloul.

The case marks the latest example of how the crown prince Mohammed bin Salman has targeted Twitter users in his campaign of repression, while simultaneously controlling a major indirect **stake** in the US social media company through Saudi’s sovereign wealth fund, the Public Investment Fund (PIF).

Salma was initially sentenced to serve three years in prison for the “crime” of using an internet website to “cause public unrest and destabilise civil and national security”. But an appeals court handed down the new sentence – 34 years in prison followed by a 34-year travel ban – after a public prosecutor asked the court to consider other alleged crimes. The prison sentence and travel ban were later reduced to 27 years on appeal.

According to a translation of the court records,, the charges included the allegation that Shehab was “assisting those who seek to cause public **unrest** and destabilise civil and national security by following their Twitter accounts” and by re-tweeting their tweets.

The same regime which has condemned Salma to 27 years in prison for advocating in favour of free speech on Twitter also owns Newcastle United Football Club, which play in the city where I am from. Find out what my fellow football fans are doing to support women like Salma on page 2...



by **ECP coach**

John Hird

Word list

PhD: (n) an abbreviation of Doctor of Philosophy

dissent: (n) difference of thinking or opinion; disagreement

Shi'a: (n) one of the two main branches of Islam, followed by about a tenth of Muslims, especially in Iran

draconian: (adj) unusually severe or cruel laws and punishment.

stake: (n) an investment in business, with the hope of financial gain

unrest: (n) political disturbance or turmoil; agitation

sportswashing: (n) the use of sport by an individual or a government, a corporation, or another group to promote or burnish the individual's or group's reputation, especially amid controversy or scandal.

Let's chat about that!

1. Who is Salma al-Shehab?
2. How long is the sentence she is serving? Do you think it is draconian?
3. What was her 'crime'?
4. Who is Mohammed Bin Salman?
5. Which football club does Mohammed Bin Salman have a stake in?
6. Explain the concept 'sportswashing' (See page 2)
7. Does 'sportswashing' exist here? Give examples.
8. Watch this news item about [NUFCFAS](#): Do you recognise anyone? What do they talk about in the video?

NEWCASTLE UNITED FANS AGAINST SPORTSWASHING



Since the Saudi state bought Newcastle United Football club over two years ago a group of NUFC fans have been highlighting the gross human rights abuses carried out by the Saudi dictatorship and opposing their attempt to use the club to divert attention away from their crimes, which is known as **sportswashing**.

The groups has organised protests outside Newcastle United's stadium and held meetings in solidarity with the victims of the 80% owners.

NUFCFAS has four goals:

1. **Supporting human rights**

It is important that we call things by their name. NUFCFAS will call out all cases of torture, draconian sentences handed out to women, discrimination of LGBT+ people, and the inhuman and internationally declared illegal use of the death penalty carried out by the regime which owns our club.

2. **Solidarity with Saudi activists**

NUFCFAS are in contact with Saudi human rights activists who have appealed to NUFC fans to show solidarity with their struggle. At the time of the takeover, Northeast politicians and commentators talked about 'engaging' with the owners over human rights concerns.

3. **Opposing sportswashing**

The Saudi dictatorship bought

NUFC to use as a key part of the Saudi Vision 2030 project, in which sport and entertainment are used to divert attention away from the dictatorship's many crimes. NUFCFAS seeks to oppose the 'normalisation' of having a bloody, theocratic dictatorship owning a football club.

4. **Reclaiming the game**

What do we want - a future where our clubs are owned by any state, including bloody dictatorships and dodgy oligarchs which use football to cover up their crimes, or a future where fans have a real say in how football is run and we really get our clubs back?

NUFCFAS LINKS

[NUFCAS Webpage](#)

[#FREESALMA CAMPAIGN](#)

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