

World's press calls for release of Saudi Arabian journalist

PARIS, FRANCE / DARMSTADT, GERMANY / RIYADH, SAUDI ARABIA: The World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers (WAN-IFRA) and the World Editors Forum (WEF) have called for the immediate release of Saudi Arabian journalist and blogger Hamza Kashgari, who was arrested on charges of apostasy after posting tweets about the Prophet Mohammed.



In a letter to King Abdallah bin Abd al-Aziz Al Saud, the global organisations of the world's press said the prosecution represented a violation of Kashgari's right to freedom of expression, as enshrined by Articles 18 and 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

"We urge you to ensure that in future your country fully respects internationally recognised rights to free expression and freedom of religious belief," the letter said.

Kashgari's tweets were written in the form of a conversation with the Muslim prophet and were posted the day before the anniversary of the prophet's birthday. After facing public outcry from the country's rulers, Kashgari publicly apologised, but this failed to placate his critics. He fled to Malaysia on 6 February, but was deported back to Saudi Arabia on 12 February.

He is awaiting trial in Saudi Arabia, a country in which apostasy is a crime that carries the maximum penalty of death.

WAN-IFRA and WEF called on the King to ensure Kashgari's immediate release, noting that, "his prosecution sends a clear message that questioning the orthodoxy of the state or raising reformist issues will not be tolerated in the country."

The full letter can be read [here](#) and more on WAN-IFRA press freedom campaigns can be found [here](#).