June 27, 2018

The Human Rights Task Force of the Association for Middle East Women’s Studies (AMEWS), an affiliate of the Middle East Studies Association (MESA), condemns the Saudi authorities’ arrest of women activists apparently to coincide with the long-awaited issuance of drivers licenses to qualified women drivers. Among those detained were Loujain al-Hathloul, a social media figure; Aziza Al-Yousef, a mother of five; Eman Al-Nafjan, a university professor, Madeha Alajroush, a psychotherapist who was part of a group of 40 women who challenged Saudi Arabia's driving ban in 1990, and most recently, Hatoon al-Fassi, a distinguished human rights activist and a valued member of the Association for Middle East Women’s Studies. Most were arrested at their homes; the charges were vague at best (e.g. 'suspicious contacts with foreign entities' or 'offering financial support to enemies overseas'). Such arrests violate human and academic rights, and undermine recent official decisions to empower women by finally allowing them the right to mobility and self-determination. The Association for Middle East Women’s Studies urges the Saudi authorities to release immediately the women activists and to follow international human rights law in all future reforms and endeavors.

In solidarity,

AMEWS Human Rights Task Force
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cc: