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Kuwait activist sentenced for insulting emir

Female rights activist sentenced in absentia to three years in jail for publicly criticising the state's ruler.

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In the days following Barrak's arrest, protesters took to the streets in his hometown province of Jahra [Getty Images]

A Kuwaiti court sentenced a female rights activist to three years in jail after convicting her in absentia of publicly criticising the oil-rich Gulf state's ruler.

The lower court on Sunday convicted Rana Jassem al-Sadoun of repeating parts of a speech made by prominent opposition leader Musallam al-Barrak for which he is serving a two-year jail term, according to the ruling.

"The Criminal Court today sentenced Rana al-Sadoun to three years with hard labour in the case of her repeating a speech by Musallam al-Barrak," Kuwaiti newspaper al-Qabas said.

Musallam al-Barrak, a former member of parliament, began serving his term for criticising an election law which he and other opposition politicians said was intended to prevent them getting power.

Sadoun was outside the country when the verdict was delivered, the court said. Activists online reported that she was in Lebanon.

'Offensive to the emir'

In April 2013, the lower court sentenced Barrak to five years in jail for insulting the emir and undermining his authority. The sentence was later reduced to two years.

Opposition groups had staged demonstrations to protest the sentence and dozens of activists repeated parts of Barrak's speech in solidarity with him.

Sadoun, a founding member of rights group the National Committee for Monitoring Violations, told the judge in March that she repeated the speech not because she supported its content but in defence of freedom of expression.

Last week, the same court gave two-year suspended jail terms to 21 other activists for repeating the same speech.

During the past three years, Kuwaiti courts have several times handed down jail terms against online activists and former lawmakers for making comments deemed offensive to the emir.

While Kuwait allows more freedom of speech than some other Gulf Arab states, the country's emir, Sheikh Sabah al-Ahmad al-Sabah, has the last say in state affairs.

SOURCE: AGENCIES