



INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL SUPPORTING FAIR TRIAL & HUMAN RIGHTS

Registration No. 2795/2012

OFFICIAL LETTER HEAD OF THE ORGANIZATION

THE REALITY OF HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION IN SAUDI ARABIA – NOT THE FAKE REFORM

In advance of Saudi Arabia's upcoming 3rd cycle UPR in November 2018, Saudi Arabia's continued violation of recommendations from its previous two UPR cycles and the deteriorating situation in the kingdom through its sustained campaign of human rights suppression casts serious doubts on the Saudi government's commitment to reform.

Ten years ago, in 2008, Saudi Arabia established the Specialized Criminal Court (SCC) to allegedly try terrorists, including members of al-Qaeda, while only in late December 2013 – five years after the establishment of the SCC – the Saudi government passed its [first counter-terror law](#). However, in an apparent paradox, already in 2014, the Saudi government began to [use the SCC to convict](#) human rights defenders and peaceful dissidents.

Among the first activist to be tried in the SCC under Saudi Arabia's counter-terror framework was one of Saudi Arabia's most prominent human rights defenders, Waleed Abu al-Khair. As a human rights lawyer, he represented numerous clients who were victims of human rights abuses. Among them members of human rights organizations and the prominent blogger Raif Badawi.

Abu al-Khair, exclusively for exercising his freedom of expression and association, human rights work and activism, and founding of an independent human rights organization faced charges of "offending the judiciary", "communicating with foreign agencies", "asking for a constitutional monarchy", "participating in media [programs] to distort the reputation of the country", and "incitement of public opinion against the public order of the country". On these accounts he was tried in the SCC under the counter-terrorism law eventually being sentenced to 15 years in prison, a 15-year travel ban, and a fine of 200,000 Saudi riyals (approximately USD 53,000).

Since then, the kingdom has used its counter-terror rubric to systematically suppress and imprison human rights defenders and activists as well as Shia protesters and activists. In January 2016, authorities executed Sheikh Nimr al-Nimr, a Shia social justice activist on false terror charges. Now there are at least 33 people – mostly Shia – on death row for such charges, including Ali al-Nimr, Dawood al-Marhoon, and Abdullah al-Zaher. In every case, the



INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL SUPPORTING FAIR TRIAL & HUMAN RIGHTS

Registration No. 2795/2012

OFFICIAL LETTER HEAD OF THE ORGANIZATION

government charged the activists with committing bogus terror crimes, including joining unlicensed organizations and distorting the reputation of the state, among other charges.

In contrast to all this repression, recently, as part of a continuing effort to promote Vision 2030, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman undertook a multi-nation tour to several Western capitals touting the kingdom's shift towards reforms, modernization and development. But reality in Saudi Arabia differs from the imagery proposed by the Crown Prince.

Since he became Crown Prince in June 2017, there has been a noticeable increase in the number of executions. Moreover, as Crown Prince, bin Salman has overseen a systematic campaign of suppression of dissent. Starting in September 2017, officials have conducted three waves of mass arrests. That September, authorities arrested around 40 people, including clerics, intellectuals, and human rights activists. Two months later, in November, Mohammed bin Salman oversaw the arrest and arbitrary detention of hundreds of princes and businessmen in Riyadh on alleged corruption charges, although officials did not charge any of the detainees. The issue continued to escalate in May 2018, when security forces arrested almost a dozen women's rights defenders.

When finally there has come a glimpse of hope in June, due to the celebrations over the Saudi authorities lifting of the driving ban imposed onto women, officials [detained](#) women's rights advocate Hatoon al-Fassi.

The discrepancy between the arrests and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's program of reform portray the hypocrisy of what is being sold internationally and what is the reality.

As a result of that, during the 38th Session of the HRC nine United Nations Special Rapporteurs released a [joint statement](#) urging Saudi Arabia to immediately release several women's right defenders arrested for their activism throughout the kingdom in late May 2018. In their statement, these independent human rights experts condemned the arrests and reaffirmed their concerns over the continued detention of other imprisoned activists, like Raif Badawi.

In their statement, the experts highlighted the contrast between celebrations over the lifting of the driving ban and the detention of women who for years had advocated for the ban's lift. The Rapporteurs note that, "in stark contrast with this celebrated moment of liberation for Saudi women, women's human rights defenders have been arrested and detained on a wide scale across the country."



INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL SUPPORTING FAIR TRIAL & HUMAN RIGHTS

Registration No. 2795/2012

OFFICIAL LETTER HEAD OF THE ORGANIZATION

ICSFT thanks the Special Rapporteurs for the statement and as the rights situation deteriorates in Saudi Arabia, we call upon all States to critically engage in Saudi Arabia's upcoming UPR in November 2018 and offer substantive recommendations in support of wide ranging reforms designed to promote and protect fundamental human rights.

We reiterate call on Saudi Arabia to release the remaining activists and demonstrate its commitment to reform by halting its targeting and detention of activists and dissidents, and to work to promote and protect human rights and fundamental freedoms.