



INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL SUPPORTING FAIR TRIAL & HUMAN RIGHTS

Registration No. 2795/2012

OFFICIAL LETTER HEAD OF THE ORGANIZATION

ICSFT WELCOMES THE JOINT STATEMENT BY 36 COUNTRIES AT THE 40TH HRC SESSION REPRIMANDING SAUDI ARABIA

During the 40th Human Rights Council session at the interactive dialogue held with the UN High Commissioner at the Human Rights Council Iceland's Ambassador to the United Nations (UN) presented a joint [statement](#) signed by 36 countries denouncing and reprimanding the multiple human rights violations perpetrated by Saudi Arabia.



H.E. Harald Aspelund, Iceland's ambassador in Geneva

This is the first time ever that States at the Council collectively condemned human rights violations committed by Saudi Arabia. ICSFT welcomes and supports this statement and calls for an immediate on the ground action to stop the ongoing human rights abuses by the Saudi regime. We reiterate our call to Saudi Arabia to immediately release prisoners of



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conscience with our any pre-condition, to end the arbitrary detention of political activists, human rights defenders, in particular women's rights defenders, and journalists.

The statement expresses concerns about reports of continuing arrests and arbitrary detentions of human rights defenders in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, including women's rights activists, and the misuse of the counter-terrorism law against civil society groups and human rights defenders who exercise their basic rights. As such the signatories called upon the Saudi government to immediately release all human rights defenders and political activists, including the women who have been arrested for their campaigning against the male guardianship system and the lifting of the driving ban on women in the country¹. The statement, of note, strongly condemns the killing of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi and remarks the need to protect journalists and to uphold the right to freedom of expression around the world. In this regard the signatory countries urge the Saudi authorities to cooperate with the international inquiry into the killing led by the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions. The countries concluded the statement by calling upon Saudi Arabia to freely ensure all the members of the public has the exercise of rights within the country without fear of reprisals.

The statement builds on the previous EU Resolutions which addressed the extrajudicial killing of Journalist Jamal Khashoggi and Saudi Arabia's place on the UN Human Rights Council and the UN Commission on the Status of Women despite the nation's numerous human rights violations. The joint statement from 36 states² is a step in the right direction sending a clear message to the Saudi authorities that the Council will hold its members accountable. Nonetheless, more work needs to be done and more States must take the necessary steps to keep the pressure on Saudi Arabia and end the loud impunity.

¹ "Since mid-2018, a group of peaceful activists have been detained in Saudi Arabia. Several were denied access to their families, while all remain without access to legal representation. In addition to being imprisoned, reports have emerged revealing that many of the detained women were subjected to torture, including flogging, sexual assault, and electric shocks. According to testimonies some of the women have been left unable to walk or stand properly, with uncontrollable shaking."

² *The States who signed the joint statement are: Iceland, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Austria, Belgium, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Portugal, Finland, Germany, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, the United Kingdom, Ireland, Estonia, Czech Republic, Croatia, Denmark, Norway, Latvia, Montenegro, Malta, Slovakia, Liechtenstein, Italy, Bulgaria, France, Romania, Greece, Cyprus, Hungary, Poland, and Monaco*



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Saudi Arabia routinely targets human rights defenders, political oppositions, journalists, and bloggers on expression-related crimes in violation of international law. Sadly the extrajudicial killing of journalist Jamal Khashoggi is not the first and only case where the Saudi government targeted and attacked individuals for exercising their right to expression. There are dozens of activists, journalists, writers, and bloggers imprisoned in Saudi Arabia. Among those are Loujain al-Hathloul, Eman al-Nafjan, Aziza al-Yousef, Nassima al-Sadah, Samar Badawi, Nouf Abdelaziz, Hatoun al-Fassi, Mohammed Al-Bajadi, Amal Al-Harbi, Shadan al-Anezi, Saleh al-Shehi, Nadhir al-Majid, Wajdi al-Ghazzawi, Alaa Brinji, Marwan al-Mureisi, and Raif Badawi.

In this context ICSFT urges Saudi Arabia to immediately and unconditionally release all activists detained on free expression charges and amend their domestic laws to lift restrictions on expression. We also urge Saudi Arabia to take meaningful steps to ensure that the public, including human rights defenders and journalists, can freely and fully exercise their rights to freedoms of expression, opinion and association, including online, without fear of reprisals.

Notably we urge the Saudi authorities to disclose all information available and to fully cooperate with all investigations into the killing of journalist Jamal Khashoggi, including the human rights inquiry by the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions. Investigations into the killing must be prompt, effective, independent and impartial, and transparent. The authors of this crime must be brought to justice.