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## OPEN LETTER TO W20 PARTICIPANTS: DEMAND THE RELEASE OF JAILED SAUDI WOMEN ACTIVISTS

**On 20-22 October, Saudi Arabia will host the Women20 (W20) Summit which according to the W20's official website "will bring together experts, representatives, and leaders from a variety of disciplines to share, innovate, accelerate and inspire dynamic solutions to advancing women towards a more equitable future." Ahead of the W20 Summit, Amnesty International addresses this open letter to all the individuals and organizations attending the Summit.**

We are writing this open letter to raise Amnesty International's serious concerns relating to the ongoing detention of women human rights defenders in Saudi Arabia, and to urge all W20 participants to take action in support of these brave women ahead of and during the Summit.

For the past few years, the government of Saudi Arabia has been trying to improve its image, investing millions of dollars in a public relations campaign to encourage foreign states and businesses to invest in the country, as part of its flagship 2030 economic vision. During this period, the Saudi Arabian government initiated several reforms regarding women's rights, such as allowing women the right to obtain a passport that should make it possible for them to travel without the permission of a male guardian.

However, women and girls continue to face systematic discrimination in law and in practice in other areas such as marriage, divorce, inheritance and the ability to pass on citizenship to their children. Women and girls remain inadequately protected from sexual and other forms of violence and continue to be detained and charged by the authorities for disobeying their male guardians. Thus, despite the commitment of Saudi Arabia as a G20 state to implement the Sustainable Development Goals, including Goal 5 (Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls) and to uphold specific G20 commitments to end all forms of discrimination against women and girls and gender-based violence, it continues to violate basic women's human rights and muzzle voices that demand equality.

Indeed, behind the highly publicized initiatives and reforms, a brutal government campaign is being carried out of repression, intolerance and human rights violations, including against prominent women activists. While Saudi Arabian authorities point to women's rights reforms such as lifting the driving ban on women in June 2018, several women activists who led the demand for the change have been arbitrarily detained since May 2018 and are now facing trial. These women had campaigned, some for decades, for the right to drive, the end of the repressive guardianship system, as well as political and civil rights for everyone in Saudi Arabia. For the first three months of their detention, several of them endured torture, sexual abuse and other forms of ill-treatment when they were held in solitary confinement with no access to their families or lawyers. Some of the women's rights defenders were temporarily and provisionally released but continue to face trial and remain at risk of being sentenced to prison terms. However, Loujain al-Hathloul, Nassima al-Sada, Samar Badawi, Nouf Abdulaziz, and Maya'a al-Zahrani remain locked up in prison, simply for demanding equality in the Kingdom.

These brave women activists must be immediately and unconditionally released so they can continue their peaceful human rights work towards a better future for their country and people.

**This year, with the G20 under Saudi Arabia's presidency, presents you with a unique opportunity to use your presence at the W20 to publicly and privately call on Saudi Arabian authorities to free jailed women activists and to undertake meaningful women's and human rights reforms without which any claims of "progress" or "positive change" remain devoid of substance and value to people in Saudi Arabia, particularly to women.**

Your participation in the W20 must not be used in Saudi Arabia's whitewashing of its international reputation while they continue to jail peaceful women activists.

Therefore, Amnesty International urges you to use your leverage at the W20 meetings, privately and publicly, to:

- Call on the Saudi Arabian authorities to immediately and unconditionally release all Saudi women human rights defenders in detention (Loujain al-Hathloul, Nassima al-Sada, Samar Badawi, Nouf Abdulaziz, and Maya'a al-Zahrani) before the W20 Summit on 20-22 October;
- Call on the Saudi Arabian authorities to drop charges against all 13 women activists on trial for promoting women's rights;

Amnesty International strongly believes that W20 participants have an opportunity and responsibility to stand with Saudi Arabian women human rights defenders in detention and encourage the implementation of meaningful human rights reforms. This is a rare chance for women's rights organizations and activists to effect positive change in Saudi Arabia. It should be well utilized to inspire a brighter future for its people.

## **ANNEX**

### **G20 COMMITMENTS ON GENDER EQUALITY AND ENDING GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE**

In 2012, the G20 said, "We also express our firm commitment to advance gender equality in all areas". (Leaders' Declaration).

In 2014, the G20 said, "We agree to the goal of reducing the gap in participation rates between men and women in our countries by 25 per cent by 2025." (Leaders Declaration) and committed to "Address legal, regulatory, cultural and behavioural barriers to employment opportunities for women". (Policy priorities for boosting female participation, quality of employment and gender equity 2014).

In 2015, the G20 committed to implementing Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals, including Goal 5 (Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.) (Leaders Declaration). In 2016, it announced an Action Plan on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, including a commitment to "Implement the 2030 Agenda domestically according to national priorities, needs and capacities, and internationally in fostering peaceful, just and inclusive societies which are free from fear and violence".

In 2017, the G20 said, "we are resolved to tackle common challenges to the global community, including ... inequality including gender inequality, as a basis for sustainable development and stability". (Leaders' Declaration)

It also committed to "take further action to improve the quality of female employment and eliminate employment discrimination and reduce gender compensation gaps and provide women with protection from all forms of violence" and to "protecting the human rights of all persons regardless of their status". (Leaders' Declaration).

The effect of cyber-violence on women and girls was also noted in 2017, with the G20 encouraging "active prevention and response to cyber violence to ensure that online spaces are free from gender-based violence and safe spaces to allow women to be active digital citizens". (G20 Initiative "#eSkills4Girls": Transforming the Future of Women and Girls in the Digital Economy)

In 2018, the G20 said it would "continue to promote initiatives aimed at ending all forms of discrimination against women and girls and gender- based violence" (Leaders' Declaration).

In 2019, G20 leaders reaffirmed they would "commit to take further action to improve the quality of women's employment, reduce gender pay gaps, and end all forms of discrimination against women and combat stereotypes and to recognize women as agents of peace, and in the prevention and resolution of conflict" (Leaders' Declaration).