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UN Human Rights Council
Twenty-Eighth Session
2 – 27 March 2015

Item 8: Follow-up to and implementation of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action
General Debate

Mr. President,

The Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action recognised:

- the promotion and protection of human rights as a matter of priority for the international community; and that
- non-governmental organizations and their members involved in the field of human rights should be enabled to play a major role on the national and international levels and should be free to carry out their human rights activities without interference.

United Nations General Assembly resolution 60/251 reaffirmed the Vienna Declaration and decided that members of the Human Rights Council shall uphold the highest standards in the promotion and protection of human rights.

While running for election to the Human Rights Council and since becoming a Council member again in 2014, a country has resorted to all available means of crushing independent human rights activism inside that country, blocked access to international NGOs, criminalized contacting and reporting human rights violations to international NGOs and the United Nations, and exercised reprisals against activists who have come here to address this Council on human rights violations in that country.

From March 2013 to March 2014, the **Saudi Arabian authorities** have not only banned and attempted to forcibly shut down the Saudi Civil and Political Rights Association (ACPRA), the Adala Center for Human Rights, the Monitor for Human Rights in Saudi Arabia, and the Union for Human Rights, but in a dizzying pattern of arrests and unfair trials following extrajudicial harassment such as arbitrary travel bans, they have dragged their founders and members to courts, including a special counter-terrorism court. They have sentenced some under counter-terror laws and others under cybercrime laws to up to 15 years in prison for dubious criminal offences such as “breaking allegiance to the ruler” and “harming the reputation of the Kingdom”.

Amnesty International has named many of these activists and incidents in a written statement to this Council session¹. We urge this Council, its members and observer states, to call upon Saudi Arabia, a Council member, to allow human rights defenders to carry on their crucial work without fear of reprisals and intimidation, and to release immediately and unconditionally human rights activists it imprisoned in the past two years.

Thank you Mr. President.

¹ *Saudi Arabia: is this what is to be expected of a UN Human Rights Council member (Part 1)?*, available at <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde23/1054/2015/en/> (UN document: A/HRC/28/NGO/19)