

Latin American and Caribbean Sections of Amnesty International appeal to Saudi Arabian Crown Prince for greater respect for human rights in Saudi Arabia

In an open letter sent today to Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince 'Abdullah bin 'Abdul 'Aziz al-Saud on the occasion of his visit to Latin America, Amnesty International's members across the region are appealing to him to address the serious human rights violations in his country.

"As citizens of a region which has suffered and continues to suffer serious human rights violations we are concerned about the persistent patterns of gross human rights violations in Saudi Arabia," the open letter said.

The letter handed over by Amnesty International's section in Venezuela on behalf of all the organization's 's sections and structures of Latin America and the Caribbean urged the Crown Prince to take the lead to turn into concrete action the Saudi Arabian authorities' commitments made to the UN Commission on Human Rights in April 2000 to promote and protect human rights in their country.

The open letter welcomed Saudi Arabia's recent accession to the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women but expressed concern about the sweeping reservations made on the Convention. The letter also welcomed the positive steps taken by the Saudi Arabian authorities, which include the invitation issued by the government to the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Independence of Judges and Lawyers to visit Saudi Arabia, undertakings

to create a committee to investigate allegations of torture and other abuses, and plans to introduce legislation to regulate the legal profession and legal advice.

"Yet, while all these commitments have been made, human rights violations continue on a daily basis in Saudi Arabia," the letter said.

So far this year at least 100 people, about 60% of them foreign nationals, have been executed, and 34 people were amputated, 70% of whom are foreign nationals. All were convicted after trials which did not meet international standards. Amnesty International does not know how many prisoners are awaiting execution or amputations as this is a government kept secret, but they may be hundreds. Among those Amnesty International fears to be at risk of execution is Sit Zainab binti Duhri Rupa who is at risk of being sentenced to death and executed despite reportedly being psychologically ill.

Torture and ill-treatment continue to be reported. Suspected political and religious opponents are constantly at risk of arbitrary arrests and indefinite detention. Such victims include people such as Dr. Said bin Zu'air, who has now been held under such conditions for more than five years.

Amnesty International, which started a global campaign on human rights violations in Saudi Arabia on 28 March 2000, has submitted to the Saudi Arabian authorities a number of recommendations which, if implemented, would help to bring about change for the better.

In this context Amnesty International has offered to send a delegation to Saudi Arabia to build an open and positive dialogue with the government.

“We are therefore taking this opportunity to openly request your Royal Highness to facilitate a visit to Saudi Arabia by an Amnesty International delegation,” the letter said.

Amnesty International is also urging the governments of Argentina, Brazil and Venezuela to raise the organization’s concerns in Saudi Arabia with the Crown Prince during his visit to their countries, and to urge him to take concrete action to improve the human rights situation in Saudi Arabia and play a leading role in the protection of such rights in the world.

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