

**25 September 2000**

**Open letter to His Royal Highness Crown Prince ‘Abdullah bin ‘Abdul ‘Aziz al-Saud on the occasion of his visit to Latin America**

Your Royal Highness,

We would like to express our wish that your trip to Latin America will strengthen the links between the people of Saudi Arabia and the peoples of this continent who share the same hope of living in a world that is committed to the protection and promotion of the human rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

We have actively campaigned against violations of human rights in the Americas including a world wide campaign against human rights violations in the United States of America. As you may be aware, Amnesty International is a worldwide movement which is independent of any government, political ideology or religious creed. It does not support nor oppose any government or political system, nor does it support or oppose the views of the victims whose rights it seeks to protect. It is concerned solely with the impartial protection of human rights in all countries of the world, including Saudi Arabia.

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 which include gross violations of the rights of women, the arbitrary arrest and detention of prisoners of conscience, summary and secret trials, torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment and punishments such as amputations and flogging, extensive use of the death penalty, and discrimination against vulnerable groups. As members of Amnesty International in Latin America and the Caribbean we would like to take the opportunity of your visit to our region to urge you to use your authority to improve this situation. As you are no doubt aware, our organization has for years been calling on the Saudi Arabian government to address this situation and on 28 March this year launched a global campaign addressing human rights violations in Saudi Arabia.

We are very encouraged by the news that the Saudi Arabian authorities have recently made the following commitments to respect human rights:

- An invitation to the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Independence of Judges and Lawyers to visit Saudi Arabia
- The introduction of a new regulation to govern the legal profession and legal counsel
- The creation of a committee to investigate allegations of torture and other abuses
- The signing of the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women in September 2000, although we are concerned about the sweeping reservations made on the Convention.
- Plans to establish human rights sections in the Ministries of Justice, Interior, Foreign Affairs and Labour
- Plans to reform the procedures of court hearings

Yet, while all these commitments have been made, human rights violations continue on a daily basis in Saudi Arabia, particularly against women as highlighted in a report launched by AI today.

So far this year at least 100 people have been executed (the majority of them foreign nationals), there have been 34 amputations, and we continue to receive reports of torture and ill-treatment. Political detainees such as Dr. Said bin Zu'air remain held without charge or trial or access to any kind of legal assistance simply because they have dared to criticize the government. Dr. Said bin Zu'air has now been held for over five years under such circumstances.

We have welcomed the commitments the Saudi Arabian authorities have made but have yet to see any real change. We would therefore request that Your Royal Highness now takes the lead in transforming spoken commitments into concrete reality. In particular we would urge that Saudi Arabia fully addresses Amnesty International's concerns on individual cases and the patterns of human rights violations we have documented; especially human rights violations against women which include discrimination by the state and abuses by private individuals.

Amnesty International continues to be ready to assist the government to bring about changes to promote and protect human rights. We have already submitted for your consideration a number of recommendations which, if implemented, would help to bring about change for the better. In the report launched today, AI makes specific recommendations with regard to women's human rights. Our organization 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. In the meantime we would like to request a meeting with Your Excellency or other government representatives in order to elaborate on our concerns during your visit to our region.

We would like to thank you in advance for your response to the proposals we have made above and wish Your Royal Highness an enjoyable stay in our region.

Yours sincerely

Amnesty International