

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT

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SAUDI ARABIA: Human rights defenders remain in detention despite promises of reform

Human Rights Council adopts Universal Periodic Review outcome on Saudi Arabia

One year following the arbitrary detention of Saudi Arabia's leading women human rights defenders, Amnesty International calls for the immediate and unconditional release of Loujain al-Hathloul, Iman al-Najfan, Aziza al-Yousef, Samar Badawi, Nassima al-Sada and all other human rights defenders detained and facing trial for their peaceful human rights work.

Amnesty International welcomes Saudi Arabia's acceptance of a number of recommendations, including to ratify the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.¹ However, the authorities persistent refuse to address the longstanding systemic discrimination against minorities, women and migrant workers, as reflected in their rejection of recommendations to ratify the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families,² the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women³ and the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment⁴ and to agree a date for a visit by the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders.⁵

In the first Human Rights Council session following the extrajudicial execution of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi, Amnesty International deeply regrets that the authorities have rejected recommendations to collaborate with and support the team of independent experts to investigate the death of the journalist. An independent investigation is the only way to reveal the full truth surrounding the circumstances of his death.

Courts continue to impose death sentences and carry out executions following grossly unfair trials, including against individuals who were under 18 at the time of their offence. Amnesty International regrets the authorities' rejection of recommendations to abolish the death penalty⁶ and calls on Saudi Arabia to immediately establish an official moratorium as a first step towards abolishing the death penalty.

No independent human rights organizations have been able to register under the Law on Associations since its enactment in 2015 and several human rights defenders have been sentenced for establishing human rights organizations. The authorities claim that freedom of expression and association are guaranteed by Saudi law, including its Law on Associations, and rejected a recommendation to bring it into conformity with international standards.⁷ Moreover, the authorities claim that the new counter-terror law issued in 2017 enhances criminal justice

¹ A/HRC/40/4 paragraphs 122.3 (Mexico) (France) (Morocco) (Latvia) (Estonia) (Portugal) (Costa Rica) (Ukraine) (Romania) (New Zealand) and 122.5 (Mexico) (France) (Morocco) (Portugal) (Costa Rica) (Ukraine) (New Zealand).

² Ibid., paragraph 122.8 (Mexico)

³ Ibid., paragraph 122.19 (Croatia)

⁴ Ibid., paragraph 122.20 (Chile)

⁵ Ibid., paragraph 122.40 (Greece)

⁶ Ibid, paragraphs 122.94 (Australia), 122.95 (Brazil), 122.98 (Costa Rica), 122.102-122.106 (Italy, Ireland, Mexico, Sweden, Norway, Slovenia, Spain, Liechtenstein, Argentina), 122.109 (Montenegro), 122.115 (Switzerland),

⁷ Ibid., paragraph 122.165 (Belgium)

and that the definition of “terrorism” and “terrorist crimes” are clear and do not negatively impact individual freedoms.⁸ However, a “terrorist crime”, as defined in the law, includes “endangering national unity” and “destabilizing public order”⁹, all of which have been and continue to be used to prosecute human rights defenders for their peaceful activism.

Saudi Arabia denies the existence of systematic discrimination against women, and claims that recommendations to abolish the male guardianship system relate merely to the authority practiced by some men over some women.¹⁰ Amnesty International calls on Saudi Arabia to end its systematic discrimination against women and abolish the male guardianship system.

Background

The UN Human Rights Council adopted the outcome of the Universal Periodic Review of Saudi Arabia on 14 March 2019 during its 40th session. Prior to the adoption of the report of the review Amnesty International delivered this oral statement.

Amnesty International also contributed to the information basis of the review through its submission on Saudi Arabia: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde23/8673/2018/en/>

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⁸ Ibid., p. 4

⁹ Article 3 of the 2017 Penal Law for Crimes of Terrorism and its Financing

¹⁰ A/HRC/40/4, p.6