**Amnesty International Condemns Saudi Arabia for Human Rights Abuses: Empty promises as crackdown intensifies**

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**Saudi Arabia has failed on every count to live up to its promises to address the dire human rights situation in the country, said Amnesty International. An Amnesty International submission ahead of a UN meeting in Geneva (UPR 17) on Monday to scrutinize the country’s human rights record details an ongoing crackdown including arbitrary arrests and detention, unfair trials, torture and other ill-treatment over the past four years.
“Saudi Arabia’s previous promises to the UN have been proven to be nothing but hot air. It relies on its political and economic clout (نفوذ)to deter the international community from criticizing its dire human rights record,” said Philip Luther, Director of Middle East and North Africa at Amnesty International.  The Saudi Arabian authorities have failed to implement any of the main recommendations from the last review by the UN Human Rights Council – known as the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) – which took place in 2009. “Four years ago, Saudi Arabian diplomats came to Geneva and accepted a string of recommendations to improve human rights in the country. Since then, not only have the authorities failed to act, but they have ratcheted (زادت وكثفت)up the repression,” said Philip Luther.
“For all the peaceful activists that have been arbitrary detained, tortured or imprisoned in Saudi Arabia since, the international community has a duty to hold the authorities to account.”

The new wave of repression against civil society which has taken place over the last two years is documented in Amnesty International’s submission to the UN as part of the review.
*Saudi Arabia: Unfulfilled Promises* highlights how human rights activists and supporters of political reform in the country face repressive measures that include arbitrary arrest, detention without charge or trial, unfair trials and travel bans.
Those imprisoned for peacefully exercising their rights to freedom of expression or association include the founders of the Saudi Civil and Political Rights Organization (ACPRA). Founded in 2009, it became one of the most prominent independent human rights organizations in the country.
On 9 March, two ACPRA co-founders – Dr Abdullah bin Hamid bin Ali al-Hamid, 66, and Mohammad bin Fahad bin Muflih al-Qahtani, 47 – were sentenced to 10 and 11 years imprisonment respectively. Even on their release they will be subjected to travel bans of at least 10 years. Other co-founders of the group have also been imprisoned.
The court also ordered the disbanding of the organization, confiscation of its property and the shutting down of its social media accounts.
“These men are prisoners of conscience who should be released immediately and unconditionally. Their peaceful activism against human rights violations deserves praise not punishment. The only guilty party here is the government,” said Philip Luther.
Torture and other ill-treatment during detention are rife in Saudi Arabia and carried out with impunity. Some of the common methods used include punching, beating with sticks, suspension from the ceiling or cell doors by the ankles or wrists, application of electric shocks to the body, prolonged sleep deprivation and being placed in cold cells.
The heavy reliance by the courts on “confessions” often extracted under torture, duress or deception has entrenched such abuses.
One detainee arrested in 2011 told Amnesty International how he was tortured for 10 days until he agreed to sign a “confession”. He said he was made to stand for prolonged periods with his arms raised, beaten with an electric cable, struck in the face, back and stomach, and threatened that he would be raped by other prisoners.
Many of these violations – against human rights defenders, protesters, Shi’a citizens, men and women – have taken place under the guise of security or counter-terrorism measures.
Other human rights violations committed by the Saudi Arabian authorities documented in Amnesty International’s report include:**

* **The systemic discrimination of women in both law and practice: Women are required to obtain the permission of a male guardian before getting married, travelling, undergoing certain surgical interventions, undertaking paid employment or enrolling in higher education. Women are still not allowed to drive.**
* **The abuse of migrant workers: One of the most vulnerable groups in the country are not protected by labour laws and are vulnerable to exploitation and abuses at the hands of private and government employers.**
* **Discrimination against minority groups:  Shi’a Muslims in the Eastern Province have been subjected to arbitrary arrests and detentions on suspicion of taking part or supporting demonstrations or expressing views critical of the state.**
* **Executions based on summary trials and “confessions” extracted under torture: Saudi Arabia remains one of the top five executioners in the world. The death penalty is applied to a wide range of non-lethal crimes such as adultery, armed robbery, apostasy, drug smuggling, kidnapping, rape, “witchcraft” and “sorcery”.**
* **Torture and other ill-treatment: Corporal punishment is used extensively in Saudi Arabia including flogging and amputation. In some cases the sentence for theft is amputation of the right hand, and for highway robbery “cross amputation” (amputation of the right hand and left foot). Flogging is mandatory for a number of offences and sentences can range from dozens to tens of thousands of lashes.**
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