



# INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL SUPPORTING FAIR TRIAL & HUMAN RIGHTS

Registration No. 2795/2012

OFFICIAL LETTER HEAD OF THE ORGANIZATION

## **SAUDI ARABIA: 3<sup>RD</sup> UPR CYCLE AND CONTINUED REPRESSION**

Ahead of the upcoming 3<sup>rd</sup> cycle Universal Periodic Review (UPR) and concerned over the continued criminalization of the right to freedom of expression and opinion, ICSFT urges the Saudi Arabian Government to implement UPR recommendations on freedom of expression, arbitrary detention, torture and ill-treatment, death penalty and corporal punishment, fair trial and due process, and positive cooperation with human rights mechanisms.

Saudi Arabia has failed to implement the majority of its recommendations from the 2<sup>nd</sup> Cycle UPR. Instead, the government has increasingly targeted human rights defenders, further restricted civic space, and continued to apply the death penalty.

In this context ICSFT calls for the immediate release of detained journalists and activists, and urges the government to amend its criminal code and code of criminal procedure in accordance with international standards.

The government has been implementing systemic and administrative measures to silence dissents including, human rights defenders, academics, opposition political parties, and rights groups. Security forces and the judiciary carry out arbitrary arrests without due process and fair trials, specialized criminal courts try civilians. In between September 2017 and January 2018 alone, more than 200 activists were arbitrarily detained under the pretext of “national security.” The Working Group on Arbitrary Detention adopted several opinions on the climate of repression and arbitrary detention in Saudi Arabia which have fallen on deaf ears as many remain in detention to date.

Saudi Arabia has also increasingly targeted political dissidents and members of the Shia minority for capital punishment. In January 2016, authorities executed Sheikh Nimr al-Nimr, a social justice activist on false terror charges. Now there are at least 33 people – mostly



# INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL SUPPORTING FAIR TRIAL & HUMAN RIGHTS

Registration No. 2795/2012

OFFICIAL LETTER HEAD OF THE ORGANIZATION

Shia – on death row for such charges.

The constitution/basic law/, the 2000 Press and Publications Law, the 2007 Anti-Cybercrime Law, the 2014 Law on Terrorism and Its Financing, the 2015 Law on Associations, and the November 2017 Penal Law for Crimes of Terrorism and Its Financing<sup>1</sup> which explicitly criminalizes expression critical of the King and the Crown Prince comprise the legislative tools used by the Saudi authorities to target and arrest activists, journalists, writers, and bloggers. Raif Badawi, Ashraf Fayadh, Saleh Al-Shehi are just a few examples of those currently in prison for crimes related to freedom of expression.

While under custody, several cases of torture and ill-treatment to extract confessions during investigations have been reported including, beatings, flogging, deprivation of food, and solitary confinement. Additionally, perpetrators of torture are not held accountable due to lack of check and balance in the justice system.

As well Saudi Arabia is sitting on the world's top executioners list as Saudi courts continue to issue death sentences for petty and non-violent crimes including apostasy, and for under age individuals, Ali Al Nimr, DAwood Almarhoon, and Abdullah Zaher who are sentenced to death for peaceful demonstrations - the number of executions per year reaching a peak in 2015, 158 executions. Mr. Ben Emmerson, the former Special Rapporteur on counter-terrorism and human rights said the specialized criminal courts are used for prosecuting human rights and political activists, following his country visit in 2017.

Women human rights defenders are also targeted by the government for their advocacy work on gender equality and the lifting the ban on women driving, although the government went on a PR campaign about the positive strides made in this regard including lifting of the draconian law that prohibited women from driving. As such, Israa al-Ghomgham is a woman

---

<sup>1</sup> A repressive anti-terrorism law that contains an extremely vague definition of terrorism and criminalizes non-violent acts of criticism including rights that fall under freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association



# INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL SUPPORTING FAIR TRIAL & HUMAN RIGHTS

Registration No. 2795/2012

OFFICIAL LETTER HEAD OF THE ORGANIZATION

**ICSFT**

activist in prison since 2015, the public prosecutor's office is seeking a death penalty against her for calling for the release of political prisoners.

As the rights situation deteriorates in Saudi Arabia, we call upon all States to critically engage in Saudi Arabia's upcoming UPR and offer substantive recommendations in support of wide ranging reforms designed to promote and protect fundamental human rights.

In light of these vile human rights violations, we urge states to publicly call on Saudi Arabia during the upcoming UPR session to stop crackdown against dissidents and abide by its commitment to human rights and political reform including, lift restrictions on free expression, call for the release of activists, journalists, amend repressive legislations, urge implementation and serious follow up of its 2<sup>nd</sup> Cycle and upcoming 3<sup>rd</sup> Cycle UPR recommendations.