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Saudi Authorities Executed Two Bahraini Prisoners





SAUDI AUTHORITIES EXECUTED TWO BAHRAINI PRISONERS

On 29 May, the Saudi authorities announced the execution of two Bahrainis accused of plotting “terrorist” operations. The statement of the Ministry of Interior accused Jaafar Sultan and Sadiq Thamer for “joining a terrorist cell led by a man wanted in Bahrain”, without mentioning any further details or indicating the leaders’ name.

It’s known that the two men underwent an unfair trial, where Jaafar told the lawyer that he was tortured and threatened with the use of violent reprisals against his family, and no investigation was done.

Jaafar Sultan and Sadiq Thamer were arrested on 8 May 2015, from King Fahd Causeway, without presenting an arrest warrant or providing a reason for their arrest. Sadeq and Jaafar were then taken to the General Investigation Prison in Dammam, and then placed in solitary confinement for more than 3 months.

Both were sentenced to death on 7 October 2021 by the Specialized Criminal Court after a trial marred by severe due process violations. Both the Appeal Court and the Supreme Court upheld the death sentence, on 11 January 2022 and 6 April 2022 respectively.

The execution crime committed by the Saudi authorities is considered “extrajudicial killing”, as both victims had denied the accusations against them after being subjected to torture and ill-treatment. Furthermore, the Saudi authorities continue to use the charge of “terrorism” with its vague definitions to punish its opponents as part of a series of repressive campaigns purely for political reasons, targeting the people of Al Qatif region, particularly.



TWO DEATH ROW INMATES WERE ASSAULTED

On 14 May, security forces at Jaw Prison raided the cell of detainees sentenced to death, insulted them and confiscated their belongings. As prisoners refused the ill-treatment, they were assaulted and beaten.

The 12 row inmates were denied access to phone calls after the assault. Their families called on the government, the Ministry of Interior, and national human rights institutions, mainly the Ombudsman, the Special Investigation Unit, the National Institute for Human Rights, and the Public Prosecution, to immediately investigate the incident, ensure the safety of inmates, and provide them with treatment in case of injuries, and reveal the recordings of surveillance cameras in the building. As none responded to their call, they tried to address the crown prince, however, his office refused to receive the families' letter. Moreover, as they drove away from the office, they were pulled over by officers who photographed the letter & collected everyone's personal details.

As the news from the 12 row death political inmates remained cut off, the family of Mohammad Ramdan tried another time to contact the crown prince's office. The same scenario was repeated, as they refused to receive the letter. The family's identities and the letter were also confiscated by police men, who surrounded the family upon their exit from the office.

The family were also ordered to appear at Al-Houra police station. There they finally received a call from their son, Mohammad Ramdan, who in turn revealed some details of the assault.



The incident, according to Mohammad Ramadan, began with an intrusive cell search by the guards. When Ramadan articulated the prisoners' complaints about their belongings being confiscated, he was shackled and held in a crucifixion-like posture for about three hours. This was followed by a scuffle and one of the guards unleashing pepper spray on the prisoners. One of the death row inmates, Hussein Marzouq, was then dragged out of the ward and beaten in front of Ramadan. Both, Mohammad and Hussein, were thrown into solitary where Mohammad had his hands and feet shackled. The shackles were eventually removed, but he spent the next 24 hours without a mattress and blanket.

On the other hand, the official institutions didn't respond properly to all the calls for disclosing the 12 death row inmates' whereabouts. Instead, the Ministry of Interior, on 15 May, confirmed in a statement that an incident had taken place but claimed it was provoked by some inmates who refused to follow instructions during inspection and organizational procedures. The official silence was only interrupted again by the announcement of the Special Investigation Unit, on 18 May, that it launched an investigation regarding the incident, and it will soon announce its findings. Until the moment of writing, no statement regarding the assault was announced.



ILL-TREATMENT IN BAHRAINI PRISONS

Ill-treatment in Bahraini prisons takes various shapes, including deprivation of medical treatment. One of those who were revoked access to medical care is the political prisoner and opposition leader Abdulwahab Husain. The 69-year-old suffers from several health problems including: diabetes, nerve damage, sickle cell disease, and retinal detachments. After 8 months of medical negligence, he was, on 9 May granted access to a specialist.

Second case refers to the detainee Mohammad Hassan Al-Raml. Mohammad had repeatedly been deprived access to medical care, which prompted him to start a hunger strike nearly 2 months ago. Al-Raml was previously allowed to see several doctors, however, he is being denied the medication prescribed.

Another detainee is facing serious health risks due to the denial of medical treatment. Fadel Abbas Abdel Rasoul is on the verge of losing his eyesight. Despite his appeals for treatment, prison authorities are refusing to give him the medication and eyeglasses that he needs.

Moreover, the detainee Hussein Abdullah Abbas confirmed that he is being deprived access to a dentist. Hussein had lost his teeth, but the authorities refused to transfer him for his appointment to have his denture. He can't eat as blood always gets out his gums.

Another form of ill-treatment detainees in Jaw Prison had suffered from during May is confiscating their cell. On 4 May, a number of cells in building 6 were informed to leave their cells for maintenance. Upon their return, they were surprised by foreign inmates housed in their cells. As they refused what happened, they were assaulted and punished by being confined to their cells 24-hours for 11 days straight and deprived of all contact with the outside world.



SHIITE CLERIC DETAINED FOR EXPRESSING OPINIONS

On 22 May, the Shiite cleric who leads Friday prayers at the Imam Al-Sadiq Mosque in Diraz Sheikh Mohammad Sanqour was ordered for investigation without disclosing the reasons. Moreover, his house was surrounded by a numerous number of police vehicles.

Later, Sheikh Mohammad was transferred to the public prosecutor's office which in turn ordered his detention for a week pending an investigation. The reasons stated were regarding his latest prayer sermon in which an official statement accused the prominent Shiite cleric of delivering "inflammatory speeches" and "insulting the authorities and publicly inciting hatred."

However, whoever hears the sermon realizes the falsehood of those claims. Sheikh Sanqour called during the sermon for disclosing the whereabouts of the forcibly disappeared prisoners and expressed his opinion of refusing the normalization policy.

Moreover, after detaining Sheikh Mohammad Sanqour, Bahraini authorities refused to receive his medication or cane he uses during walking for knee pain. In addition, it refuses all requests for release submitted by his lawyer.

Bahrainis refused the detention of Sheikh Sanqour which is categorized under targeting religious freedom. Bahrainis carried out mass demonstrations in various regions, calling for the release of Sheikh Mohammad. Finally, Sheikh Sanqour was released after four days of detention.



BAHRAIN RANKS 171ST IN THE WORLD PRESS FREEDOM

On the World Press Freedom Day, Reporters Without Borders revealed that Bahrain ranks 171st in the index of freedom of press. The kingdom has moved down the rankings table by 4 places in the global index from 2022, from 167th to 171st rank among the world's 180 countries.

Moreover, it ranks the latest in the Gulf countries. The organization showed that Bahrain came in sixth rank in the Gulf in press freedom, Saudi Arabia fifth, Oman fourth, the UAE third, Kuwait second, and Qatar first.

Moreover, on the same occasion, the Bahrain Press Association released a report that recorded 41 infringements against journalists, media professionals, and civil society activists during 2022.

The violations recorded by the association are as follows: 17 cases of interrogation and arrest, 9 judicial procedures, and other 15 various violations. The ongoing monitoring carried out by the association since 2011 shows that 4 recurring charges topped most of what was brought against those who were summoned or whose cases were transferred to trials, namely: insulting a statutory body, spreading false news, insulting religious symbols, and defamation and slander. Lawsuits pertaining to the Internet, social media and mobile chat applications accounted for about 95% of the documented cases.



SIX SAUDI PRISONERS OF CONSCIENCE WERE EXECUTED

DURING MAY

During May, the Saudi authorities executed 6 prisoners of conscience without warning or notifying their families. Instead, the families were informed by the statements of the Ministry of Interior, during which the death sentences were announced. Moreover, the authorities refused to hand over the bodies of the executed victims to their families, and even concealed their burial places.

On 2 May, the Ministry of Interior announced the execution of Minhal Abdullah Al-Rebih. The statement accused Minhal of several fabricated charges, which are usually used against prisoners of conscience, including joining a terrorist cell and shooting at security vehicles. Minhal was arrested from Al-Waha School in Al-Awamiyah in 2017 (his and his family's place of residence) over his participation in the peaceful popular marches in Qatif in 2011. His arrest falls under the category of arbitrary detention, as he was presented without an arrest warrant or legal justification.

The second case refers to the prisoner of conscience Anwar Jaafar Al-Alawi, who was executed on 9 May 2023. The Ministry of Interior declared that Anwar's charges include joining other wanted individuals in shooting at a police station, and providing assistance to a security wanted person by covering him up. The Ministry of Interior did not specify which police station was targeted, who were involved in the crime, or even the date of the alleged assault. Keeping these details hidden reinforces the hypothesis that they are all baseless, and that they are pure allegations, but that the execution took place only on a political background.

On 22 May 2023, the Saudi authorities committed a new crime, announcing the execution of 3 prisoners of conscience, Hassan Al-Muhanna, Haidar Mois, and Mohammad Mois, after fabricating charges against them, including joining a camp outside the Kingdom in service of a terrorist organization. The three young men were arrested during 2013 and subjected to various types of violations, including torture, and deprivation of the basic necessities of life.

On 23 May 2023, the execution of prisoner of conscience Ahmad Ali Al-Bader was announced, after he had been arrested in 2016. The statement of the Ministry of Interior accused Ahmad of several fabricated charges including: communicating with an enemy country, and leaving the kingdom illegally. As usual, the details of these charges were not specified, such as naming the enemy country or specifying the date of the illegal exit.

The murder committed by the Saudi authorities against the young men confirms their continued use of the death penalty, despite all international demands, especially the recent ones issued by the Human Rights Council. The last five executions raise double concern, as no human rights body was able to record their cases before announcing the execution, meaning that the real numbers of those threatened with execution are many times greater than those monitored by human rights organizations.

NINE SAUDIS ON DEATH ROW DESPITE THEY WERE MINORS AT THE TIME OF ALLEGED CRIMES

The recent executions rang the alarms for those on death row in Saudi Arabia, especially who were minors at the time of alleged crimes. At least nine young men are at risk of execution in Saudi Arabia for crimes they allegedly committed as minors, in direct contradiction of official claims to have ended this violation of international human rights law.

All of the nine had their death sentences upheld between October 2022 and March 2023. They are: Abdullah Al-Huwaiti, Ali Al-Mabiyouq, Ali Al-Subaiti, Abdullah Al-Derazi, Hassan Al-Faraj, Jalal Al-Labad, Jawad Qureiris, and Youssef Al-Manasef. The families of two of them, Abdullah Al-Derazi and Youssef Al-Manasef, addressed the US secretary of state, Antony Blinken. In their appeal, the Al-Derazi family urged Blinken to intervene on Abdullah's behalf, saying the young man from the Qatif region of Saudi Arabia had been rounded up by authorities and imprisoned in order to "scare people to stop them from protesting".



From its side, the United Nations Human Rights Council has issued a statement denouncing the planned executions of three people for reportedly opposing the Neom mega project in Saudi Arabia. The concerns relate to three members of the Huwaitat tribe: Shadli Al-Huwaiti, Ibrahim Al-Huwaiti and Atullah Al-Huwaiti.

CALLS ON MICROSOFT TO SUSPEND INVESTING IN SAUDI ARABIA

18 rights groups said that Microsoft should suspend its plans to invest in a new cloud data center in Saudi Arabia until it can demonstrate how it will mitigate potential rights abuses. There is an enormous risk that Saudi authorities may obtain access to data stored in Microsoft's cloud data center, thus posing unique and direct threats to human rights and privacy, the human rights groups said.

The Saudi government's abysmal human rights record, history of infiltrating technology platforms to spy on human rights activists, deployment of sophisticated cyber surveillance software – including spyware – against dissidents, and vague and broad provisions of its anti-cybercrime and data protection laws call into serious question the ability of Microsoft to uphold its human rights responsibilities in the country.

“The Saudi government's record of violating privacy rights with impunity poses a grave danger to data stored within its borders,” said Joey Shea, Saudi Arabia researcher at Human Rights Watch. “Microsoft needs to conduct a thorough human rights due diligence process and publicly detail how it will mitigate the potential adverse human rights impacts associated with Saudi Arabia hosting the data center.”



SIX MILLION CHILDREN ARE JUST ONE STEP AWAY FROM STARVATION

“Yemen remains one of the most food insecure countries globally, mainly driven by the impact of conflict and economic decline,” three UN agencies said.

The food security situation in Yemen’s districts under the control of the Government of Yemen (GoY) slightly improved during the first five months of this year, while acute malnutrition increased, compared to the same period in 2022, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), and the UN World Food Programme (WFP) added.

The agencies warned that as acute malnutrition continues to worsen in southern governorates, it is estimated that in 2023, half a million children will be acutely malnourished, including nearly 100,000 children who are likely to be severely malnourished. Moreover, UNICEF added through a tweet that “across Yemen, almost 6 million children are just one step away from starvation. They are in dire need of urgent support.”

On the other hand, the three agencies continued to say that 15.3 million people, including 8 million children, are in desperate need of water, sanitation & hygiene services in Yemen.



COALITION COUNTRIES OBSTRUCT AIR TRAFFIC IN YEMEN

Although a truce between Yemen and the coalition countries has been implemented, the coalition countries continue to commit several human rights violations. On the first field, the coalition countries obstruct the operation's progress at Sana'a Airport.

According to the Director of Sana'a International Airport, Khaled Al-Shayef, only 84,000 passengers were transported during a year of the armistice, compared to 2 million passengers annually before the war.

The Undersecretary of Civil Aviation and Meteorology, Raed Jabal, indicated that the coalition countries rejected the requests of Djibouti, Jordanian, Al-Saeeda airlines and other companies to operate flights to and from Sana'a International Airport.

On the other hand, coalition countries' practices are threatening the marine environment. The Ministry of Fisheries revealed that the coalition ships are repeatedly throwing hundreds of tons of waste into the waters of the Gulf of Aden. It further emphasized that polluting Yemeni waters with waste thrown by commercial and international ships is an irresponsible act that causes the destruction of the Yemeni marine environment, and leads to harm to marine life and fishermen.