



The Honorable John F. Kerry
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

Mr. Secretary,

We write to express our deep concern regarding the human rights situation in Saudi Arabia and to urge you to reevaluate current U.S. policy toward the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and to develop and implement policies that will more effectively support the need for increased human rights protections.

Mr. Secretary, in your address to the United Nations Human Rights Council on Monday you made it clear that no country on earth should be free from scrutiny. The country of Saudi Arabia enjoys an astonishing level of impunity despite occupying a seat on the very same council before which you spoke. Furthermore, you emphasized in your remarks the importance be the voice for those who are silenced by their leaders. Through means of intimidation, enforced disappearances, and expansive anti-terror legislation, the Saudi government has succeeded in silencing its people. We therefore ask you to make their voice heard during your meeting with King Salman.

The Saudi government has targeted peaceful human rights defenders. Human rights lawyer Waleed Abu al-Khair was tried by the Specialized Criminal Court—the Ministry of Interior’s anti-terrorism tribunal—and sentenced to 15 years in prison, a 15-year travel ban, and a \$53,000 fine. The Saudi government has also shuttered prominent civil society organizations through the systematic arrest of their members. Eleven of the founding members of the Saudi Civil and Political Rights Association (ACPRA) have either been imprisoned or are facing the prospect of trial and imprisonment.

Continued governmental efforts to curtail the fundamental rights of women are also in need of your urgent attention, Mr. Secretary. Despite the limited reforms advanced by King Salman’s predecessor, Saudi women still suffer widespread discrimination. The Guardianship System is still in force. Authorities continue to prevent women from driving, and punishments levied against women human rights activists have escalated. Samar Badawi, who in 2012 received the International Woman of Courage Award from then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, has been banned from international travel by the Saudi government since 3 December 2014; a punishment believed to be a result of her international work on behalf of human rights in Saudi Arabia including a recent trip to Washington where she met different members of congress as well as officials from your department.

In light of the above violations, we request that U.S. policy toward Saudi Arabia includes:

- Sustained high-level public as well as private calls on the Government of Saudi Arabia to adhere to its human rights commitments as a member of the Human Rights Council and as party to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment CAT and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women CEDAW, and to ensure the enactment meaningful reforms, including the release of all political prisoners, accountability for torture, and an end to discrimination against women.
- A thorough review of the terms of the Technical Cooperation Agreement between the U.S. Department of State and the Saudi Ministry of Interior. Given the Ministry's primary role in arresting and imprisoning human rights defenders and its permissive attitude toward acts of torture and arbitrary detention, the terms of agreement of the U.S.-led training of the Facilities Security Forces (FSF) should be revised to include human rights considerations.
- Publicly encouraging the new king to reverse his predecessor's restrictive stance toward civil society groups and to expand their field of operation, thereby granting acknowledgment to the basic freedoms of expression and political organization.
- Publicly pressing the Saudi government to speed the implementation of all Universal Periodic Review recommendations accepted during its second-cycle UPR review.

Thank you very much for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

Americans for Democracy & Human Rights in Bahrain