



Mr. President,

Americans for Democracy & Human Rights in Bahrain and the European-Saudi Organisation for Human Rights would like to draw the Council's attention to Saudi Arabia's continued denial of the rights to freedom of expression in contravention to the Vienna Declaration.

Over the past two weeks, officials of the Saudi State Security Directorate arrested and detained over 16 individuals due to their peaceful criticism of the Saudi government. Security forces arrested many of the individuals in unannounced raids, in which they also seized computers and cellphones, before holding them in incommunicado detention. Among those detained are prominent clerics, academics, poets, and economists. While the Saudi government claims the individuals work for foreign states, the individuals were instead detained for using their social media accounts to criticize Saudi Arabia's policies towards Qatar.

Within the past week, Saudi authorities arrested two prominent human rights defenders, Abdulaziz al-Shubaily and Isa al-Hamid on free expression charges. Both al-Shubaily and al-Hamid are cofounders of the human rights and political reform organization, the Saudi Civil and Political Rights Association, which was forced to close in 2013 in the face of government persecution.

Despite the Vienna Declaration's call for states to respect and promote fundamental freedoms, Saudi Arabia continues to target peaceful dissidents because of their peaceful expression. We call on the kingdom to end its suppression of activists and peaceful dissidents and to commit to upholding the VDPA.

Thank you.