

Madame Rapporteur,

IDO and ADHRB welcome your appointment to the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on promoting human rights while countering terrorism. In the context of your first report as Rapporteur, we would like to raise our concerns about the targeting of human rights activists in Saudi Arabia under the guise of fighting terrorism.

Saudi Arabia, which passed its first counterterrorism law in 2013, frequently uses the pretense of fighting terrorism to arrest and jail human rights activists. The primary vehicle for the government's assault on human rights activism has been the Specialized Criminal Court – a court system established in 2008 to try terrorists and whose mandate stems directly from the counterterrorism law.

Since 2011, the Saudi government has used the Specialized Criminal Court and counterterrorism law to crack down on human rights activists. Among the first targeted were the members of the prominent human rights organization the Saudi Civil and Political Rights Association. In 2012, the SCC forced the Association to close. Since then, it has sentenced its members, most prominently Mohammed al-Bajadi, Mohammed al-Qahtani, and Abdullah al-Hamid, and most recently Abdulaziz al-Shubaily, and Issa al-Hamid.

In recent months, the government has used its 2013 counterterrorism law, and new 2017 counterterrorism law to target many remaining human rights defenders: Mohammed al-Otaibi and Abdullah al-Attawi were sentenced in early January, Essam Koshak was sentenced on Tuesday, and Naimah al-Matrod, the first woman tried in the SCC, was sentenced in November.

The SCC has also sentenced activists to death on spurious terror charges. In July, the kingdom executed four peaceful protesters after torturing them into giving false confessions. This has spurred concerns of further executions, in particular of peaceful protesters like Ali al-Nimr, Dawood al-Marhoon, Abdullah al-Zaher, Abdulkareem al-Hawaj, and Mujtaba al-Suwaiket.

Madame Rapporteur, Saudi Arabia has systematically used the pretense of countering terrorism to target human rights activists. Given this, what recommendations would you make, in your new mandate, to the government halt this crackdown?

Thank you