



6 April 2017

Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian  
Ministry of Foreign Affairs  
37, Quai d'Orsay  
F - 75351 Paris, France

Dear Foreign Minister Le Drian,

Americans for Democracy & Human Rights in Bahrain (ADHRB) writes to you ahead of the 9 – 10 April visit to France by Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, to highlight the importance of discussing human rights in meetings with the Crown Prince. The Crown Prince's visit is an important chance for France to demonstrate its commitment to promoting and protecting human rights and the principles of *liberté, fraternité, and égalité*. We urge you to raise concerns over Saudi Arabia's widespread and systematic human rights abuses and to call on the Crown Prince to place human rights at the center of Saudi Arabia's development and security agendas.

Over the past several years, Saudi Arabia has touted its Vision 2030 Plan for Sustainable Development, a plan meant to ensure sustainable economic growth. To support it, the Crown Prince bin Salman has visited several Western capitals as well as technology and start-up firms to emphasize the importance of technological innovation to economic development.

This tour is an attempt to whitewash the kingdom's human rights abuses on a number of issues, from women's rights and the war in Yemen, to the arrests of human rights defenders and activists and use of the death penalty.

Vision 2030 calls for increasing women's roles in the economy in an effort to increase economic growth, and it represents one way in which the Crown Prince has positioned himself as a reformer willing to address gender inequality. Vision 2030 envisions increasing women's participation in the workforce from 22 percent to 30 percent. However, this is hardly a cause for celebration. Women want to work; when Saudi Arabia's passport agency opened 140 jobs for women, [over 107,000 applied](#). Until Saudi Arabia ensures complete gender equality and allows women equal access to economic opportunities, the kingdom will be unable to grow sustainably.

Crown Prince bin Salman has also overseen a royal decree granting women the right to drive, discussions about whether women [need to wear abayas](#), and women's presence at [three sports stadiums](#). When combined with laws and decrees addressing domestic violence and allowing access to education, it appears that the kingdom is making progress on women's rights. The progress, however, is symbolic, and depending on the situation, may be ineffectual. The kingdom has not addressed the underlying nature of the male guardianship system, which still grants women's guardians' the ability to make important decisions for them.

Crown Prince bin Salman has also highlighted the importance of ensuring regional security, using the importance of fighting terrorism as a way to dismiss concerns over human rights violations. Beginning in 2011, Saudi officials have used the kingdom's counter-terror courts to sentence human rights defenders, activists, and members of the Shia Muslim minority community to lengthy jail sentences, travel bans, and execution, on the basis of "fighting terrorism," although many were exercising their universal rights to free expression and opinion, free assembly and association, and freedom of religion and belief in

criticizing the government, royal family, and religious establishment. For example, beginning in 2012, under the guise of fighting terrorism, authorities systematically targeted the members of the Saudi Civil and Political Rights Association (ACPRA), a human rights organization, jailing the majority of its 11 members. Mohammed al-Qahtani and Abdullah al-Hamid were sentenced to 15 years in prison in 2013, while [Abdulaziz al-Shubaily](#) and [Issa al-Hamid](#) were sentenced in 2016 to eight years 11 years in prison, respectively. Other peaceful activists who are currently in jail are [Waleed Abu al-Khair](#), [Raif Badawi](#), [Mohammed al-Otaibi and Abdullah al-Attawi](#), [Essam Koshak](#), and [Issa al-Nukheifi](#).

Members of the kingdom's Shia Muslim minority, constituting 10-15 percent of the population, have been particularly at risk of being labeled as "terrorists" for engaging in peaceful protests. Since Mohammed bin Salman became Crown Prince in June 2017, not only has the number of [executions skyrocketed](#), but the number of [Shia Muslims on death row](#) and at risk of execution has also increased. There are currently at least 40 men on death row for political crimes, like participating in peaceful protests, most of whom are Shia. Among them are seven young men who were minors at the time they allegedly committed their "crimes," including [Ali al-Nimr](#), [Dawood al-Marhoon](#), [Abdullah al-Zaher](#), [Mujtaba al-Suwaiket](#), [Abdulkareem al-Hawaj](#), Salman al-Quraysh, and Abdullah al-Sareeh

In addition, under Crown Prince bin Salman's leadership, Saudi Arabia has overseen the deterioration of the situation in Yemen. Since Saudi Arabia's engagement in the conflict in March 2015, the death toll in Yemen has surpassed 10,000, with the kingdom and its coalition allies responsible [for over half](#) of the deaths. Due to the kingdom's actions, Yemen has also been ravaged by disease, with nearly a million Yemenis being affected by a [cholera outbreak](#), and additional concerns over [malaria](#) and [diphtheria](#).

Foreign Minister, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's visit to France is an opportunity to raise concerns surrounding the war in Yemen, suppression of human rights defenders, the use of capital punishment against peaceful protesters, and lack of serious progress on women's rights. The Crown Prince has promoted himself as a reformer working to improve Saudi Arabia's economy and ensure regional stability. However, these efforts will be for naught as long as Saudi Arabia continues to engage in systematic and widespread human rights violations. His desire for economic development and growth and regional stability cannot be achieved without enforcing domestic reforms ensuring full gender equality, and promoting and protecting fundamental freedoms like the rights to the freedoms of expression, opinion, assembly, association, religion and belief, and press. Foreign Minister, as France is a close ally with good relations with Saudi Arabia, ADHRB calls on you to make raise these issues in your discussions, and to demonstrate France's commitment to the principles of equality, liberty, and universal human rights.

Sincerely,



Husain Abdulla  
Executive Director  
Americans for Democracy & Human Rights in Bahrain (ADHRB)