



6 April 2017

President Emmanuel Macron
Élysée Palace
55 Rue du Faubourg Saint-Honoré
75008 Paris, France

Your Excellency,

Americans for Democracy & Human Rights in Bahrain (ADHRB) writes to you ahead of the 9 – 10 April visit to France by the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia, Mohammed bin Salman Al Saud, to highlight the importance of discussing human rights in your meeting 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 make human rights and equality central to your meeting with the Crown Prince and to call on him to place international standards of human rights at the heart of Saudi Arabia's development and security agendas.

Over the past several years, Saudi Arabia has touted its Vision 2030 Plan for Sustainable Development, which would diversify the kingdom's economy away from petroleum to ensure sustainable economic growth. As part of this plan, Crown Prince bin Salman has visited several Western capitals, including London and Washington, as well as technology and start-up firms to emphasize the importance of technological innovation to economic development.

However, Saudi Arabia's approach to sustainable economic development and Vision 2030, in particular, is fundamentally flawed, and the Crown Prince is attempting to disguise this during his international tour. Sustainability in growth and economic development can only be achieved by ensuring full gender equality, and promoting and protecting fundamental freedoms, including the rights to the freedoms of expression, assembly, association, religion, and press. Without legally and practically guaranteeing these freedoms, Saudi Arabia will not be able to achieve sustainability in development or economic growth.

For example, women continue to face structural barriers to their engagement in Saudi society, including in employment. While recent, much-heralded developments led by the Crown Prince have opened up limited avenues of work, women are only 22 percent of the kingdom's workforce, although over half of college graduates are women. While Vision 2030 envisions increasing women's participation in the workforce to 30 percent, 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.

More broadly, without promoting and protecting Saudis' rights to the freedoms of expression, assembly, association, religion, and press, the kingdom will be unable to promote economic and technological innovation and lure much-needed foreign investment. As long as restrictions on universal and basic rights remain in place, and violations of these rights entail lengthy prison sentences and sometimes execution, Saudi Arabia will be not be able to foster an environment conducive to sustainable economic development and growth.

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. 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.

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 ten thousand, 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](#).

Your Excellency, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman has promoted his efforts to improve Saudi Arabia's economy and ensure regional stability. These efforts will be for naught as long as Saudi Arabia continues to ignore human rights reforms. 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. Your Excellency, as France is a close ally with good relations with Saudi Arabia, ADHRB calls on you to make these issues the centerpiece of 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)