

Mr. High Commissioner,

Alsalam and ADHRB thank you for your actions throughout your term as High Commissioner and welcome your remarks, in particular concerning the universality of human rights.

Saudi Arabia has frequently pushed back against universal human rights principles, including concerning women's rights and civil and political space, claiming they are at odds with Saudi society. Despite these claims, there have been numerous Saudi activists advocating for domestic reforms from a Saudi perspective that support these universal international human rights norms. Because of their activism, these brave activists have often been the victims of targeted campaigns of suppression.

For example, in late May, the government arrested almost a dozen people working to promote women's rights, many of whom had long campaigned for women's rights, pressing the Saudi government to end the male guardianship system and to allow women to drive. After they were arrested, state media engaged in a malicious smear campaign, vilifying the activists as "traitors."

Although many were released, their arrests, which come just before the Saudi government is set to lift the ban on women driving on June 24, demonstrate the extent to which the government's pledges to reform are empty: even while Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman touted reforms, he has imprisoned the activists calling for reforms.

Saudi Arabia must recognize the universality of human rights and take serious steps to embrace them in their national context by releasing all detained human rights defenders and lifting restrictions on peaceful activism.

Thank you.