



Saudi Arabia should release defenders, undertake meaningful rights reform UPR report adoption

- delivered by John Fisher, 14 March, 2019

A large number of human rights concerns were raised during the UPR of Saudi Arabia, such as the detention of Saudi human rights activists – including women driving activists – jailed solely for peacefully advocating reform, as well as systemic discrimination against women, justice for the slain journalist Jamal Khashoggi, and violations of international humanitarian law in Yemen.

But the responses provided by Saudi Arabia in some cases fail to match the reality on the ground, and in others reflect an unwillingness to bring national laws and practices into conformity with international law.

The Saudi government has rejected key recommendations on critically important human rights problems, including the immediate release of all human rights defenders arbitrarily detained. Since 2017, Saudi authorities have undertaken mass detentions, including of human rights activists, independent clerics, and academics. Authorities have held many for months without charge or trial.

While Saudi Arabia has abolished the ban on women driving since its previous review, other government-enforced guardian restrictions remain in place, including on travel outside the country.

The government only noted recommendations in its previous review to establish a moratorium on the death penalty, and has subsequently executed over 700 people, including many for non-violent drug crimes, in violation of international law.

While the government has accepted recommendations in its current review to provide a transparent investigation into the murder of Jamal Khashoggi, Saudi Arabia rejected recommendations calling for participation of international experts in the investigation. To date, the ongoing trial of 11 individuals for the murder has lacked transparency.

We deeply regret that Saudi Arabia rejected a recommendation to fully cooperate with United Nations human rights mechanisms to investigate allegations of violations of international humanitarian law in Yemen. Since March 2015, Human Rights Watch has documented about 90 apparently unlawful attacks by the Saudi-led coalition, some of which may amount to war crimes. As a member of this Council, Saudi Arabia has an obligation to cooperate with Council mechanisms.

Will Saudi Arabia comply with international human rights law and its membership obligations by immediately releasing all human rights activists jailed for advocating peaceful reform, removing government-enforced travel restrictions for women, declaring a moratorium on the death penalty, starting with those convicted of non-violent drug offenses, and fully cooperating with the UN Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions on her inquiry into the Khashoggi murder, and with the Yemen Group of Eminent Experts?

If Saudi Arabia refuses to address these serious human rights concerns through the UPR, we urge the 36 States which presented the joint statement this session to ensure stronger measures are put in place through a resolution.