

## **Statement under general debate, item 2**

### **45<sup>th</sup> session on the United Nations Human Rights Council**

Mme President,

I have the honour of delivering this statement on behalf of a group of states.

We welcome reform steps by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to improve the human rights situation, most recently restricting the use of flogging and curbing use of death penalty against minors for most crimes.

While acknowledging these positive measures, we remain concerned about the overall human rights situation in Saudi Arabia.

Civil society, human rights defenders, journalists and political opposition still face persecution, detention and intimidation. We deeply regret the continued detention of at least five women's human rights defenders, arrested in 2018. We reiterate our call for the release of all political detainees and are particularly concerned about the use of the counter-terrorism law and other security provisions against individuals peacefully exercising their rights.

We remain deeply concerned by reports of torture, arbitrary detention, enforced disappearances and detainees being denied access to essential medical treatment and contact with their families. We recall the recommendations from the Committee against Torture in this regard.

We strongly oppose the death penalty, including against minors and for non-violent crimes.

We welcome recent positive steps in women's rights. However, we remain deeply concerned about the persisting discrimination of women and girls and urge Saudi Arabia to take further actions for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.

More than a year ago the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial killings, summary or arbitrary executions shared her conclusions on the murder of Mr. Jamal Khashoggi. We reiterate our call for transparency and holding all those responsible accountable.

Finally, we reiterate that Council membership comes with an expectation of upholding the highest standards in the promotion and protection of human rights. Members must expect public scrutiny of their human rights record. In its capacity as a candidate to the Council, we urge Saudi Arabia to uphold the highest human rights standards and fully cooperate with the Council and its Mechanisms. We stand ready to work constructively with you in this regard.

Thank you.