

Lawyers' Rights Watch Canada

Human Rights Council 40th session

UPR adoption: Saudi Arabia

Speaker: Salma El Hosseiny

Mr President,

We call upon the Saudi authorities to immediately and unconditionally release Loujain al-Hathloul, Aziza al-Yousef, Eman al-Nafjan, Nouf Abdelaziz, Hatoon al-Fassi, Samar Badawi, Nassima al-Sadah, Mohammed Al-Bajadi, Amal Al-Harbi, and Shadan al-Anez, and all other individuals detained for exercising their fundamental freedoms and to drop all charges against them.

We are particularly concerned about the government's rejection of recommendations calling for the immediate and unconditional release of all human rights defenders, and the claim that, "accusations of people being imprisoned for their defence of human rights and freedom of expression are untrue". We reiterate that the women human rights defenders are only detained because they fought for their right to exist equally as men in their country. In addition, human rights defenders have been sentenced to hefty prison sentences by the Specialised Criminal Court solely for their legitimate defence of human rights. Their detention is arbitrary and they should be immediately and unconditionally released.

A broad definition of terrorism contained in the 2017 Anti-terrorism Law is used to target human rights defenders. We urge the Saudi authorities to immediately implement the recommendations it accepted on revising the definition of terrorism to ensure that it is no longer applicable to non-violent expression.

We welcome the fact that the authorities accepted the recommendations to amend the Anti-Cyber Crime law, but we regret that the Saudi government rejected the recommendations made to amend the law on associations. We urge the authorities to amend all restrictive laws to ensure that defenders can carry out their work without hindrance.

As a member of this Council, Saudi Arabia must fully cooperate with the Council's mechanisms. To honour this obligation, Saudi Arabia should: accept all pending visit requests by Special Procedures; prohibit reprisals against human rights defenders; ensure accountability for perpetrators of rights violations and immediately implement the calls made by 36 States to "ensure that all... can freely and fully exercise their rights to freedoms of expression, opinion and association, including online, without fear of reprisals".

We urge the Saudi authorities to fully disclose all information and fully cooperate with the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial killing, summary or arbitrary executions in her investigation into the killing of journalist Jamal Khashoggi.

Thank you Mr President.