

An Update On the Situation of Human Rights Defenders in Saudi Arabia

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Intimidation and Reprisals for Accessing International and Regional Mechanisms

- HRD **Issa al-Nukheifi** was targeted for cooperating with the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights ahead of his January 2017 to the country. The 2018 Secretary General’s reprisals report also highlighted the case of **Salim Abdullah Hussain Abu Abdullah**, who was the subject of an opinion by the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention in June 2017 and he has since been repeatedly placed in solitary confinement and been denied regular contact with his family.¹

Crackdown against women human rights defenders

- Dozens of WHRDs who have been active in the campaign to end the driving ban and the guardianship system have been arrested and detained in 2018. **Noha Al Balawi** and **Maria Naji** were detained in January 2018, while **Loujain al-Hathoul**, **Dr. Eman Al-Nafjan** and **Aziza Al Youssef** in May 2018 and continue to be detained. **Dr. Aisha al-Mana**, **Madeha al-Ajroush**, **Hessa al-Sheikh** and **Walaa Al Shubbar** were also arrested in May 2018 but have been released. **Dr. Hatoon al-Fassi** as well as **Ibrahim al-Modeimigh**, and members of ACPRA **Mohammed al-Bajadi** are also detained.² Many of the charges are state security related but stem from activism promoting women’s rights. Official and semi-official media outlets embarked on a defamation campaign against the detained WHRDs calling them “traitors” and “agents of embassies”.³
- On 30 July 2018, Saudi officials arrested prominent WHRDs **Samar Badawi** and **Naseema Alsada**. They are being held in solitary confinement and have been denied access to their lawyers and contact with their families.⁴
- On 21 August 2018, the kingdom’s public prosecutor recommended the SCC give six human rights defenders, including **Israa al-Ghomgham** the death sentence. If the court accepts the recommendation and the king upholds the verdict, al-Ghomgham would become the first woman executed for human rights activism and advocacy.⁵

¹ ‘Cooperation with the United Nations, its representatives and mechanisms in the field of human rights’, <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G18/247/10/PDF/G1824710.pdf?OpenElement>.

² Gulf Center for Human Rights, ‘Crackdown on Saudi women human rights defenders sets off alarms’, <https://www.gc4hr.org/news/view/1880>

³ Gulf Center for Human Rights, ‘The Vision 2030 Saudi Arabia Reform Plan: Women Human Rights Defenders in Saudi Arabia cease to exist’, <https://www.gc4hr.org/report/view/85>

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Human Rights Watch, ‘We have two months to save Israa al-Ghomgham’s life’ <https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/08/28/we-have-two-months-save-israa-al-ghomghams-life>.