



Report on the human rights situation in Saudi Arabia

March
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منظمة سند الحقوقية





Summary

As the human rights situation in Saudi Arabia continues to deteriorate, with Saudi authorities insisting on violating rights, expropriating freedoms, and continuing to suppress activists and reform advocates, Sanad human rights organisation publishes its March 2022 monthly report on the human rights situation in the Kingdom. This report covers the most prominent violations against human rights practiced by the regime, as well as the most noteworthy demands and responses by the international human rights community during the past month.

This report details the news of the mass execution of 81 people on March 12 which gripped the local human rights scene, reverberating up to international human rights organisations which denounced this brutal act that lacked the most basic standards of justice and transparency in judicial and criminal procedures. This report also highlights the arrest of a number of activists, such as Sheikh Abdul-Jalil Al-Makrani and the youth Omar Shaibouba. Violations continued in prisons against a number of prisoners of conscience, including deliberate medical neglect and delays in releasing those who had completed their term or who had not been charged at all.

The month also saw the release of a number of personalities, such as blogger Raif Badawi, Dr Abdul Aziz Al-Hamidi, young Hani Al-Fuhaid and Mrs Fawzia Al-Zahrani.

The following is a summary of the human rights situation in Saudi Arabia for March 2022:



Executions

Sanad, as well as other human rights organisations worldwide, monitored the statement of the Saudi Ministry of Interior issued on Saturday, March 12, 2022, which stated that 81 people will be executed within one day. Authorities claimed that the death sentence was, “as a result of their involvement in or attempting to commit murder, deliberately disrupting national security and targeting innocent lives.”

At Sanad, we believe that these executions lack transparency and the integrity of criminal procedures, and are nothing but a means - by the regime - to terrorise people and prevent them from claiming their basic rights. We call on the Saudi regime to implement transparency and clarity in such penal procedures, starting with the integrity of the investigation procedures, ensuring that the defendants attain their full rights, such as allowing the appointment of lawyers, informing the defendant of all charges made against them, and holding the trials publicly and with an independent judiciary, without interference or pressure from any person or entity. Sanad also expresses its concern that the Saudi regime may be using the death penalty as a tool of political blackmail and repression against its political opponents and any opposition. Sanad also rejects all manifestations of the threat of the death penalty against intellectuals, activists and detainees for merely expressing their opinions and positions regarding the regime.





International response to the executions in Saudi Arabia

The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights condemned the mass execution carried out by the Saudi regime against 81 people on terrorism charges, stressing that, in just one day, this operation exceeded the total of 67 executions said to have occurred in the whole of 2021. OHCHR report that their monitoring systems indicate that some of those executed were sentenced to death following trials that did not meet fair trial and due process guarantees, and for crimes that did not appear to meet the most serious crimes threshold, as required under international law. The Commission called on the Saudi regime to stop all executions, impose an immediate moratorium on the use of the death penalty, and commute death sentences against those on death row.

Meanwhile, Amnesty International said that the mass execution of 81 people - Saudi and non-Saudi nationals - indicates a horrific escalation in Saudi Arabia's use of the death penalty, bringing the total number of executions in the country to 92 in 2022 alone. 'Such a shocking number of deaths also reveals Saudi Arabia's lack of transparency in death penalty cases since we know that the number of trials resulting in prisoners being placed on death row is always significantly higher than what is publicly reported. Many individuals today in Saudi Arabia are at imminent risk of execution. Saudi Arabia should also ensure that the courts do not accept any "confessions" or other statements extracted through torture.'

Human Rights Watch issued a statement saying: "The Saudi authorities' execution of 81 men on March 12, 2022 was its largest mass execution in years despite recent promises to curtail its use of the death penalty." They added, "Given the widespread and systematic abuses in the Saudi penal system, it is very likely that none of the men received a fair trial."

Human Rights Watch stressed that, “As a deliberate strategy to deflect from the country’s image as a pervasive human rights violator and to offset the scrutiny and reporting of human rights organisations and domestic activists on human rights, Saudi Arabia is spending billions of dollars hosting major international events. While these initiatives can be used for beneficial purposes, Saudi Arabia is using these government-funded events with celebrities, artists, and athletes to whitewash its poor human rights record and deflect efforts to hold its leadership accountable for these abuses.”





Arrests

Despite the Saudi government's attempts to whitewash its reputation by sponsoring and promoting art and entertainment, it does not tolerate any artistic contributions aimed at educating people about their rights, or artists who do not follow the government's trend in using entertainment and art to serve oppression and tyranny.

In this context, the youth Omar Shaibouba was subjected to arbitrary arrest by state security forces in Makkah after 'electronic flies' launched a fierce campaign against him. This came in the backdrop of several rap songs he performed which he says are "intellectual revolutionary songs". Young Omar is still subject to enforced disappearance and is denied access to his family or a lawyer.

Human rights sources also revealed the arrest of Sheikh Abdul-Jalil Al-Makrani in early March 2022 without any reason, before releasing him at the end of the month without charge and without giving reasons for his arrest and detention for 25 days.

Many detainees were arrested and later released without knowing the reasons for their arbitrary arrest by security forces, in clear violation of citizens' rights and freedoms. Dozens remain in arbitrary detention without charge or trial, and the regime is still delaying their release.



Prison violations

The detained young man, Abdullah Al-Huwaiti, was transferred to hospital after his health deteriorated after being on hunger strike since March 9 in objection to the arbitrary sentences that are threatening him with death. Human rights organisations have reported that Al-Huwaiti is on hunger strike, and that this has led to the deterioration of his health and his subsequent transferral to a psychiatric hospital, particularly in light of his subjection to solitary confinement and psychological and physical torture. Young Al-Huwaiti was arrested by Saudi authorities in the campaign of arrests in April 2020 that targeted a group of the Al-Huwaitat tribe and the people of Khraibeh. The last session of Al-Huwaiti's trial was on January 17, according to his mother.

In light of the systematic abuse and repression against prisoners of conscience, the regime is delaying the release of Dr Muhammad Al-Khudari who completed his sentence in February. It is noteworthy that the Court of Appeal reduced the sentence against Al-Khudari from 15 to 6 years, with half the term discounted given his age, which means he should have been released. Al-Khudari, 85, has been subjected to very poor sanitary conditions since entering prison, and has been deprived adequate health care due to deliberate medical neglect.

Sources confirm that foreign detainees are being subjected to arbitrary harassment by forbidding them from contacting their families abroad. Human rights sources added that Dhahban prison administration has been blocking international calls for foreign detainees, and has been preventing them of communicating with their families for more than a month. Many families of prisoners of conscience are deprived of their legitimate rights, including cutting off contact with their detained children, not being permitted to visit, not knowing the place of their detention or the reason for their arrest or the court sessions they are exposed to, as well as other rights.



Trials

Human rights sources announced that one of the charges against the detained elder Dr Ibrahim bin Hayel Al-Yamani was his visit to Sheikh Yusuf Al-Qaradawi in Qatar. The Public Prosecution has charged Al-Yamani with communicating with external parties and belonging to a banned group. Recently, Al-Yamani was transferred to one of the cells where extremists are held, and they have threatened to kill him more than once. His life is at great risk and it is feared that he may meet the fate of Dr Musa Al-Qarni and others who were brutally killed in prison via a third party.

Sources also report that Dr Muhammad Al-Hudayf had arbitrary sentences maimed at him, with the Saudi Court of Appeal increasing his sentence from 9 years to 13 years. Al-Hudayf was arrested by the regime in 2016 on the background of several charges the regime fabricated, including causing division in the country, communicating with hostile parties, and insulting a friendly country.



Releases

Sanad confirmed that authorities have released the young blogger, Raif Badawi, after he spent 10 years in prison for expressing his opinion on the policy of separating between religion and state. Badawi was arrested in 2012, and on March 1 he ended his 10 year prison sentence. Badawi's release was conditional, however. He is banned from traveling for 10 years and is prohibited from speaking on social media. Badawi was subjected to many violations whilst incarcerated, and in 2020 he went on a hunger strike in protest against the ill-treatment he was subjected to by the prison administration, and for them not allowing him to communicate with his family.

Sanad learned that the Saudi government released Dr Abdulaziz bin Ahmed Al-Humaidi after arresting him last November, with no known reason for his arrest. Al-Humaidi is a Professor of Theology at Umm Al-Qura University. He holds a master's degree and a doctorate in Theology. He has written a number of publications on combating extremism.

The Saudi regime also released Hani bin Muhammad Al-Fuhaid after he was subjected to systematic enforced disappearance in government detention for 10 months following his arrest by security forces in May 2021. Al-Fuhaid, a young student in his thirties, was arrested as part of the May 2021 arrest campaign which targeted young people, especially activists, in the Kingdom.

Sanad also confirmed the news of the release of Mrs Fawzia Bint Gharamallah Al-Zahrani, aged 51, who was arrested in early 2021 without any reason for her arrest. She spent 8 months in detention following her forcible disappearance. She was only permitted to communicate with her family once; she informed them of her arrest without revealing her whereabouts.



**Demands by the
international community**

Human Rights Watch condemned the Saudi regime for its continued unjust detention of a group of Egyptian Nubians on arbitrary charges related to abusive speech, association, and terrorism. The Saudi regime arrested four men in October 2019 after a Nubian community organisation organised an event commemorating the contributions of Nubian soldiers in the October 1973 war with Israel. Saudi authorities released them later that year but rearrested the four men, as well as six additional men in July 2020. The Nubians are still facing harsh detention conditions in the racist prisons of the regime, where the regime transferred them in May 2021 to Asir prison in the city of Abha. Human rights sources announced that on March 27, their first trial session was held at the Specialised Criminal Court, in which the lawyers presented their defence. The next session is scheduled for June 14.

Amnesty International has warned against the Saudi regime's behaviour in resorting to forcibly deporting two Uyghur Muslims to China, after their arrest in the Kingdom. Amnesty International said the Saudi authorities should halt plans to extradite two Uyghur men to China, where they would be at grave risk of torture amid the brutal crackdown Muslim minorities are facing in the country's Xinjiang region. Amnesty International added that the religious scholar Aimedola Wiley and his friend Nurmiti Rosie, who have been detained in Saudi Arabia since November 2020 without any charge, were transferred to the capital, Riyadh, last week, and are now believed to be at imminent risk of forcible deportation to China. The two Uyghur men have been detained since November 20, 2020, and were held in Dhahban Central Prison in Jeddah before being transferred to Riyadh, where the Saudi regime did not give Wiley and Rosie a reason for their arrest, nor did they inform them of any charges held against them.

Human Rights Watch also criticised the Saudi government for violating international resolutions prohibiting the execution of minors. The Saudi regime systematically issues the death sentence against children it alleges committed crimes. Human Rights Watch reported that Abdullah Al-Huwaiti was 14 years old at the time of his alleged crime.

His death sentence was overturned by the Saudi Supreme Court who called for a retrial, but in his retrial, he was once again found guilty and was sentenced to death for a second time on March 2, 2022. Human Rights Watch indicated that the Northern Tabuk Criminal Court ignored the authorities' own evidence that Al-Huwaiti had an alibi, basing their verdict almost entirely on his and other defendants' confessions. Human Rights Watch has consistently denounced the widespread abuses in the Saudi criminal justice system against defendants in criminal cases that include long periods of detention, delays in trial, and other violations.

Human Rights Watch has recently called on the English Premier League to protect clubs from the outrageous exploitation of Mohammed bin Salman in securing stakes in clubs to whitewash their crimes against human rights. Human Rights Watch said: "The English Premier League should immediately adopt and implement human rights policies that would prohibit governments implicated in grave human rights abuses from securing stakes in Premier League clubs to whitewash their reputations." It added that, "The ban should be extended to state entities that they control, abusive state leaders, and individuals funding or otherwise assisting in serious abuses". Human Rights Watch concluded saying: "The Saudi government has gone all-out in the past years to bury its human rights abuses under public spectacles and sporting events. Until there is real accountability for these abuses by the Saudi leadership, those silently benefiting from the kingdom's largess risk being an accomplice in whitewashing their crimes."



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