



SANAD Annual Report

2024

Saudi Arabia
Twin Tragedies
of Executions and
Fatal Neglect

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Statement by the Chairman of the Board of Trustees of SANAD Human Rights Organization Dr. Saeed bin Nasser Al-Ghamdi

In a world boiling with turmoil and crises, fueled by oppressive regimes in the East and West, human rights remain the most urgent and delicate issue of our time. It is a call to humanity as a whole governments, institutions, media, and activists to stand united against human rights violations everywhere. In a country like Saudi Arabia, where freedom is crushed, voices are silenced, and the darkest forms of repression and intimidation are practiced, it becomes crucial to shed light on these abuses committed by the regime against its people, without any accountability.

The time has come for us all to stand together, collectively, to confront this oppressive system with one voice: Enough! Enough of your atrocities, enough of crushing the rights and liberties of the people.

Uncovering this dark reality, advocating for freedom, rights, and reform in the Kingdom, and revealing the abuses faced by detainees, activists, thinkers, and human rights defenders is a duty that cannot be overlooked. The situation in Saudi Arabia is catastrophic in every way, and concerted efforts are imperative to push for justice and reform. Remaining silent—or turning a blind eye—about the regime's violations and its transgression will only lead to more oppression and tyranny.

Through our annual report at SANAD, we aim to shed light on the countless abuses committed by the regime, its vicious and oppressive tactics, and the myriad victims whose stories remain untold. We are committed to uncovering as much as we can about the state of human rights in Saudi Arabia in 2024, driven by our belief in the power of truth and accountability.



Executive Summary

The Saudi regime, through its media, economic, entertainment arms, political ties, and international lobbying networks, continues to attempt to improve its global image and whitewash its human rights violations, presenting itself as committed to international standards and obligations related to freedoms and rights.

However, the reality tells a completely different story. Human rights violations persist, restrictions on freedom of expression remain in place, political participation is absent, and there is a lack of transparency in judicial procedures, criminal cases, and the management and distribution of wealth.

The use of the death penalty in the country is expanding at an alarming and frightening rate, without clear or transparent information about the judicial processes involved in implementing this punishment. This further confirms that such sentences are purely political and may be used to eliminate political opponents and individuals who openly express their opinions, whether in public or on social media.

Despite a few symbolic releases of individuals arbitrarily detained without any valid legal basis, arrests have continued noticeably in 2024 for the same reasons—posting on social media or showing solidarity with prisoners of conscience. This reflects a lack of genuine willingness on the part of the Saudi regime to close this deeply troubling file.

In 2024, the systematic crackdown on journalism and journalists continues. There are no signs of press freedom in Saudi Arabia. As a result, many media outlets and journalists have been reduced to echo chambers that promote the regime's superficial achievements and false narratives. Social media influencers are also being used for this unethical purpose—sometimes through incentives, other times through intimidation.

Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman has repeatedly attempted to deceive Western media and the international community into believing that the judiciary in Saudi Arabia is independent. However, this narrative continues to collapse day after day. In the absence of a clear legal framework for trials and criminal procedures, the continuation of secret trials, the banning of international human rights organizations from observing court sessions, and the interference of the Royal Court in legal proceedings and verdicts—all prove that what Mohammed bin Salman claims is nothing more than an attempt to exonerate himself from responsibility for these violations.



I. Executions

Mohammed Bin Salman (MBS) – The Hand Behind Modern Saudi Arabia’s Darkest Days

The year 2024 marked a troubling escalation in Saudi Arabia’s use of the death penalty, transforming it into a key tool for political and social repression. Authorities targeted individuals for a range of reasons, including expressing opinions, peaceful dissent, and even something as minor as a single tweet.

Under the leadership of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, Saudi Arabia recorded a staggering 345 executions in 2024, 47 of which were tied to vague and fabricated charges related to freedom of expression. This made 2024 the bloodiest, if not the darkest, year in the kingdom’s modern history, reflecting a blatant disregard for basic human and legal principles—all taking place against a backdrop of troubling international silence.

Saudi authorities justified these executions with broad and ambiguous charges such as “betraying the homeland/nation,” “adopting terrorist ideologies,” or “showing solidarity with detainees” (many of whom are/were prisoners of conscience). Nowadays, a social media post can be grounds for terrorism accusations, which reflects a systematic policy of silencing dissent and tightening the grip on freedom of speech.

These executions were carried out following trials that lacked even the most basic standards of justice and transparency. Legal safeguards for fair trials were blatantly ignored, in a clear violation of international agreements that protect freedom of expression as well as human rights.

Among the executions documented by SANAD is the case of the Saudi citizen Dhafer Al-Shahri, executed for a single tweet. Another case involves the Shia citizen

Among the executions documented by SANAD is the case of the Saudi citizen Dhafer Al-Shahri, executed for a single tweet. Another case involves the Shia citizen Abdulmajeed Al-Nimr, accused of “affiliating with Al-Qaeda» revealing how the regime fabricates charges and uses the law as a tool of repression.

The unspeakable increase in the death penalty bears direct accountability to Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman. Under his leadership, the regime has taken on an alarming repressive character, using the death penalty as a way to terrorize and intimidate society and suppress any voice calling for reform or criticizing official policies.

Names of those executed for political reasons in 2024.

- | | | |
|----------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------|
| Abdulaziz Al-Shahrani | Saeed Al-Wadai | Ahmed Al-Shammari |
| Mohammed Bin Haddad | Abdullah Al-Saidi | Awad Al-Asmeri |
| Nouman Al-Dhafiri | Abdulrahman AlShammari | Abdullah Al-Shammari |
| Hussein Al-Nasser | Abdullah Al-Zahrani | Yahya Hazazi |
| Mojtaba Al-Ismaïl | Mowafaq Al-Harbi | Mohammed Al-Johar |
| Mohammed AlAbduljabbar | Mohammed Al-Ateeq | Abdullah Al-Muheishi |
| Abdulmajeed Al-Nimr | Abdullah Al-Qunaian | Ahmed Al-Eisa |
| Talal Al-Hudhali | Abdullah Al-Shahri | Dhafer Al-Shahri |
| Mishaal Al-Ghannam | Zayed Al-Kaabi | Majdi Al-Kaabi |
| Saad Bin Bashir Al-Ruwaili | Omar Al-Shahri | Khaled Al-Shahri |
| Ali Bin Abdullah Al-Saiari | Nayel Al-Ruwaili | Saad Bin Musnad AlRuwaili |
| Saleh Al-Saiari | Ali Bin Saleh Al-Saiari | Abdulaziz Al-Amri |
| Abdullah Al-Ghamdi | Mohammed Al-Amri | Muteb Al-Saiari |
| Sami Jizani | Abdulaziz Al-Tuwaim | Awn Al-Abdullah |
| Abed Al-Anzi | Abdullah Al-Kuaibi | Hassan Al-Hazoubar |
| Majid Al-Deehan | Abdulrahman Al-Otaibi | |





II. The 2024 Hajj Catastrophe

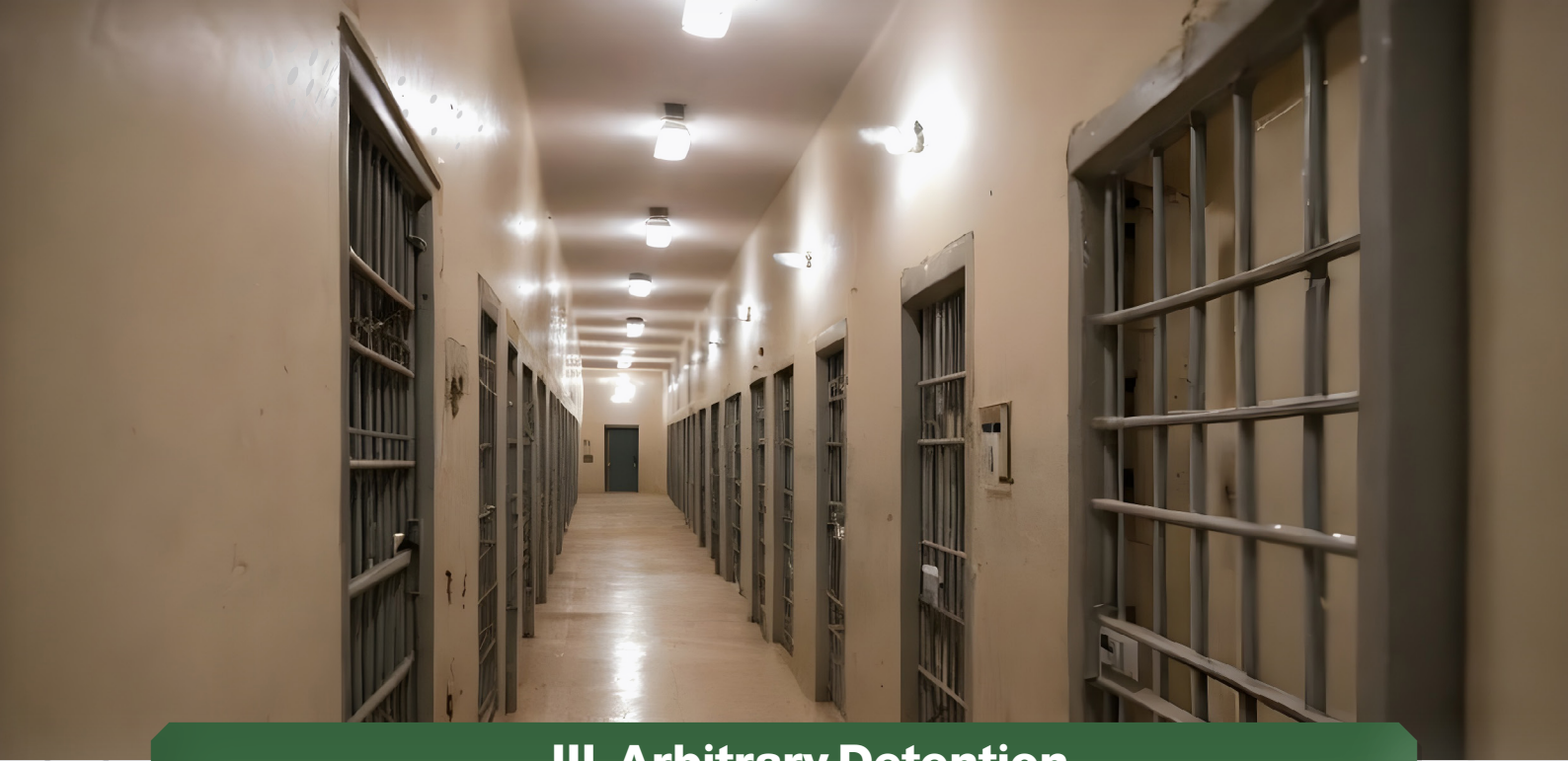
A Heartbreaking Tragedy and Saudi Negligence Leaving Over 1,400 Dead

According to official statistics, the 2024 Hajj turned into a devastating catastrophe, with more than 1,400 pilgrims from across the globe losing their lives. This tragedy was primarily caused by the Saudi authorities mismanagement and lack of preparedness, particularly in the face of an intense heatwave. Despite the scale of this disaster, there were delays in releasing accurate death tolls. It wasn't until human rights groups, media outlets, and a flood of social media videos exposed the situation that the reality came to the surface.

Survivors testimonies revealed a clear absence of basic as well as simple preventive measures that could've protected pilgrims from this disaster. Traffic was restricted to narrow pathways, and those without the proper documents required by Saudi authorities were prevented from using vehicles, leaving them to walk more than 20 kilometers under the scorching sun. Moreover, those who survived—and witnessed—stated that there was a lack of any protective measures or adequate first aid stations, in addition to clear delays by health authorities in providing necessary care to individuals suffering from heatstroke and heat exhaustion, which contributed to the rising number of casualties.

Despite prior predictions of a severe heatwave, authorities failed to take adequate measures to mitigate its effects, such as increasing water distribution points, providing sufficient shade, or enhancing on-site ambulance services. Additionally, no clear warnings were issued to pilgrims about the dangers of the heat, nor were sufficient guidelines provided to help them protect themselves.

Instead of acknowledging the disaster and being fully accountable, Saudi authorities opted for suppression and media manipulation. Official media coverage turned a blind eye to the scale of the tragedy, while security forces arrested several people who spoke up about it. Among them was Egyptian lawyer, Islam Sobhi, who was detained after posting a video on social media narrating his observations of the negligence and failure that led to the death of numerous pilgrims.



III. Arbitrary Detention

Between the Light of Documented Names and the Shadows of the Unknown

The atmosphere of fear and intimidation imposed by Saudi authorities on citizens has led many families of detainees to hesitate in revealing the arrests of their loved ones. This situation became particularly evident in 2024, when cases of arrests from previous years came to light, alongside the documentation of new arrests that occurred during the same year. This underscores the Saudi authorities continued systematic campaigns of arbitrary detention.

In this context, SANAD highlights that the restrictions imposed by Saudi authorities severely hinder efforts to document cases of detention, creating a clear gap between recorded cases on the ground and those that remain unknown. SANAD believes numerous other cases of detention have not been documented due to the prevailing atmosphere of intimidation and fear, which discourages families from reporting these violations.

SANAD also clarifies that it has received credible information regarding the detention of specific individuals but is refraining from disclosing it at this time, at the request of families who fear retaliation, or due to a lack of supporting documentation that would enable the responsible and accurate release of this information.

Despite the significant difficulties and challenges faced by SANAD in documenting detention cases, the organization has managed to document 9 cases of detention in 2024, relying on confidential sources and it has obtained.

Below are the cases documented by SANAD during 2024:

Teacher: Asaad bin Nasser Al-Ghamdi

Based on exclusive documents, SANAD Human Rights Organization revealed the arrest of teacher, Asaad bin Nasser Al-Ghamdi, on November 20, 2022, due to tweets he posted on his Twitter account criticizing the government policies. These included mourning the death of Dr. Abdullah Al-Hamid and criticizing the Vision 2030 projects. The Specialized Criminal Court initially sentenced him to 20 years in prison, followed by a 20-year travel ban upon release. However, in October 2024, the Appeals Court overturned the ruling and issued a new sentence, reducing his prison term to 15 years. He is currently serving this arbitrary sentence in Dhahban Central Prison in Jeddah.



In prison, Al-Ghamdi has been subjected to numerous violations, including enforced disappearance and arbitrary arrest in a brutal manner, involving a nighttime raid on his home that terrorized his family. He has faced psychological and physical torture, including being administered drugs that severely impacted his mental and psychological state, as well as deliberate medical neglect, leading to a deterioration in his health. He was held in solitary confinement for three months, during which he was denied communication with his family. Additionally, he endured humiliating transfers from Dhahban Central Prison in Jeddah to Al-Hair Prison in Riyadh for trial, during which he was shackled hand and foot, his head covered, and forced to walk quickly, causing him to stumble and sustain severe injuries. During these transfers, he was handed over to Riyadh investigators in the same degrading manner and then thrown into a small room overcrowded with prisoners awaiting trial, where they endured inhumane conditions, including being denied access to toilets.

For more information, read SANAD's report on the case: [The Arrest of Teacher Asaad bin Nasser Al-Ghamdi and His 20-Year Prison Sentence Over Tweets](#)

The Caricaturist: Mohammed Alhazza

Based on exclusive documents obtained by SANAD, it was revealed that authorities arrested teacher and cartoonist, Mohammed bin Ahmed bin Eid Alhazza Al Ghamdi, in February 2018. His arrest was linked to his previous work as a caricaturist for the Qatari newspaper, Lusail, despite having ceased working there shortly before his detention. He was charged with sympathizing with Qatar and defaming the government. The Specialized Criminal Court initially sentenced him to 6 years in prison and a subsequent 6-year travel ban. However, his case was later reopened, and the court issued a new, non-appealable sentence of 23 years in prison. He is currently serving his sentence in Dhahban Central Prison in Jeddah.



In prison, Alhazza has been subjected to numerous violations, including enforced disappearance for several months after his arrest, during which he was denied all communication with his family; a violent and humiliating arrest that involved raiding his home without presenting any legal documents; fabricated charges related to freedom of expression, with the court ignoring the defense evidence he presented; physical and psychological torture, including being coerced into signing confessions under duress; deliberate medical neglect despite suffering from diabetes and serious health issues, leading to a deterioration in his condition; severe restrictions on family visits; and degrading treatment in prison.

SANAD Human Rights Organization has emphasized that all charges against Mohammed Alhazza fall within the scope of legally guaranteed freedom of expression and that his trial was marked by a lack of integrity and the fabrication of evidence.

For more information, read SANAD's report on the case: [SANAD reveals for the first time the arrest of a caricaturist and his 23-year prison sentence over his drawings](#)

The Podcaster: Hatem Al-Najjar

SANAD has revealed the arrest of the Palestinian journalist and podcast host of Morraba on Thmanyah channel, Hatem Al-Najjar, over tweets he posted when he was under the age of 18.

Al-Najjar's arrest followed a vigorous online campaign in early January 2024 targeting his account on the platform «X», which resurfaced old tweets from the time of King Abdullah's reign. In these tweets, he had expressed his views on various issues. As a result of this campaign, Hatem Al-Najjar was arrested.

According to information available to SANAD, Al-Najjar has been detained since mid-January 2024 in Al-Ha'ir Prison in Riyadh. As of now, there is no further information regarding the conditions of his detention or the charges brought against him.



Nasser Abdulrahim Al-Ghamdi

In September 2022, Saudi security forces arrested Saudi citizen, Nasser Abdulrahim Al-Ghamdi, for exercising his basic right to peaceful expression of opinion on X.

According to sources close to Al-Ghamdi, his arrest was due to several tweets he posted on his X account, which included criticisms of the Ministry of Health's handling of the COVID-19 pandemic, calls to address unemployment, and critiques of the activity of electronic bots in suppressing hashtags that express societal demands.

Informed sources confirmed to SANAD Human Rights Organization that the Specialized Criminal Court sentenced Nasser Al-Ghamdi to 13 years in prison last year for the same tweets that led to his arrest.



Ali Abdulkarim Khalid Abdullah

According to information obtained by SANAD Human Rights Organization, Saudi authorities arrested Saudi citizen Ali Abdulkarim Khalid Abdullah last Ramadan, March 2024, for criticizing the poor conditions faced by orphans in Saudi Arabia. Sources in contact with SANAD indicate that Ali remains detained, as of the writing of this report, in Dhahban Central Prison, without being brought to trial or formally charged.



The Sheikh: Ali bin Jamaan Al-Ghamdi

SANAD has obtained information confirming the arrest of Sheikh Ali bin Jamaan Al-Jabri Al-Ghamdi, a notable figure within the Baljurashi tribe and a respected leader of the Ghamid tribe. According to sources close to his case, Sheikh Ali has been detained since 2023, with no official clarification provided regarding the reasons for his arrest.

The Military Officer: Abdullah Kheder Abdullah Ghazi

SANAD Human Rights Organization has obtained information confirming that Saudi authorities arrested Abdullah Khader Abdullah Ghazi, a military officer, and have held him in intelligence detention for over two years.

According to information received by the organization, Abdullah Ghazi had previously been arrested and detained for 11 years, followed by 4 years of release. However, he was rearrested two years ago, and the reasons for this detention remain unknown, with no formal charges brought against him.

Muhannad Abdulrahman Mohammed Ghannam Al-Ghamdi

SANAD Human Rights Organization obtained information indicating the arrest of citizen and Security College student Muhannad Abdulrahman Mohammad Ghannam Al-Ghamdi two years ago. His arrest traces back to his time as a student at the college, where he had made significant progress in his academic journey and presented himself as a loyal security officer dedicated to the state. In fact, he passionately and fervently defended the policies of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman.

However, the Saudi regime's electronic committees unearthed an old tweet from his X account, posted when he was a young first-year high school student, in which he criticized certain social and political conditions. Although Muhannad had completely forgotten about this tweet and had shifted from being a critic to a staunch supporter of the state, he was arrested and expelled from the Security College.

Despite attempts by his prominent family within the Ghamid tribe to intervene and mediate his case, their efforts were met with rejection by the authorities, who summoned his family and forced them to sign a pledge not to interfere or mediate in his case.

Khalid bin Naji Al-Shammari

SANAD Human Rights Organization has received information indicating the arrest of Khalid bin Naji Al-Shammari, the Director of the Education Office in Rafha Governorate, two years ago, following his criticism of the three-semester academic system during a social gathering.



According to informed sources, authorities have sentenced him to 13 years in prison. The information also revealed that he was subjected to enforced disappearance within intelligence detention, where he was allowed to communicate with his family only once via a phone call.

Arrest of Saudi Citizens on Charges of Leaking Sentencing Details to the Convicted Themselves

Marking an unprecedented escalation in repressive measures within Saudi Arabia, the Ministry of Interior announced in a statement in October 2024 the arrest of several Saudi citizens accused of leaking information about the sentencing details of detainees to the detainees themselves. SANAD has not yet been able to identify their names.

It is worth noting that the right of an accused person to know their sentence is a fundamental right guaranteed by international human rights law, as well as Saudi domestic law. Article 182 of the Criminal Procedure Code stipulates that the convicted person must be immediately informed of the verdict issued against them. Turning this right into a crime represents a violation of the principles of justice and transparency and has raised concerns about the true motives behind these arrests.



IV. Decades Behind Bars for a Tweet

Saudi Arabia's Relentless War on Free Speech

Saudi authorities continue to issue harsh, long-term prison sentences against activists and social media users for expressing their opinions through tweets. This phenomenon has escalated significantly, with tweets containing political views, criticisms of the government, or calls for reform being classified as crimes under the umbrella of «terrorism» or «threatening national security.»

SANAD has documented numerous cases over the past year that ended in arbitrary sentences against prisoners of conscience, some exceeding 20 years. Detainees are often charged with vague accusations based on broad laws, all while fair trial standards are absent.

The Retired Teacher: Mohammed bin Nasser Al-Ghamdi

In August 2024, Saudi authorities, under intense international pressure, overturned the death sentence issued against retired teacher Mohammed bin Nasser Al-Ghamdi. However, instead of releasing him in response to the decision by the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, they issued an arbitrary ruling in September sentencing him to 30 years in prison.



SANAD also revealed that Al-Ghamdi was subjected to numerous violations, including being transferred by Saudi security forces—shackled and bound—to Riyadh to be presented before another judge and given a new trial before the final verdict was issued. However, after spending several weeks in Al-Ha'ir Prison, no progress was made. He was not brought before any judge, nor was he given a trial, and he was returned to Dhahban Prison.

The Saudi authorities not only failed to bring him before a judge and transferred him between Riyadh and Jeddah while shackled—despite his deteriorating health—but also deliberately neglected his medical care in Dhahban Prison. This neglect led to a severe episode that caused him to collapse unconscious and break one of his teeth. Despite Al-Ghamdi's repeated requests to see a specialist due to his worsening health, the authorities refused. After his prolonged insistence and when his pain reached a critical level, he was finally seen by a general practitioner in the prison, who lacked the necessary expertise to address his condition. The prison administration continued to deny him access to a specialist. As a result of this ongoing medical neglect, Al-Ghamdi remains in deteriorating health, suffering from persistent pain.

Notably, authorities arrested Al-Ghamdi in July 2022 over tweets he posted through a pseudonymous account on X, which had fewer than ten followers. In July 2023, the Specialized Criminal Court issued a death sentence against him. Below are the long-term sentences documented by SANAD Human Rights Organization in 2024:

Abha Detainees: 83-Year Prison Sentence for Five Individuals Simply for Attending a Public Seminar Held a Decade Ago

SANAD Human Rights Organization has obtained exclusive and confidential documents related to the arrest and trial of five prisoners of conscience, who were sentenced to a combined total of 83 years in prison and an equivalent travel ban. They include retired teacher Mohammed Yahya Kadwan and several faculty members from King Khalid University in Abha: Dr. Mohammed Ali Al-Hazmi, Dr. Ali bin Hassan Al-Almi Asiri, Dr. Rashid bin Hassan bin Mohammed Al-Almi, and Dr. Qasim Mohammed Al-Qathardi, all arrested in July 2021.

- Saudi authorities arrested Dr. Mohammed bin Ali Al-Hazmi, a professor of Arabic at King Khalid University, on July 7, 2021, for attending an authorized seminar in 2013 and tweets attributed to him calling for the release of prisoners of conscience. He was charged with vague accusations, including supporting a banned group and undermining security, based on weak and unlawful evidence, such as old speeches and a non-banned book. Al-Hazmi was subjected to arbitrary arrest and an illegal nighttime raid on his home. Despite being over 64 years old and in deteriorating health, the court denied his request for temporary release. The Specialized Criminal Court issued a sentence of 23 years in prison, along with an equivalent travel ban.

- Saudi authorities arrested retired teacher Mohammed Kadwan on July 7, 2021, for attending an authorized seminar in 2013 titled «Freedom Between Slogan and Reality» and delivering a speech at a mosque. Kadwan faced vague charges, including supporting terrorist ideology and harboring extremist thought, despite the alleged evidence being weak—such as a personal statement containing general information that did not prove any crime. Kadwan clarified to the court that the seminar was licensed and publicly announced, and he had already been held accountable for the speech he delivered. In addition to his imprisonment, Kadwan was arbitrarily fired from his job and had his salary cut off, despite being the sole provider for his large family. Despite the lack of strong legal grounds for the accusations, the Specialized Criminal Court sentenced him to 20 years in prison, along with an equivalent travel ban.

•Saudi authorities arrested Dr. Ali bin Hassan Asiri, an assistant professor at King Khalid University, on July 8, 2021, for attending an authorized seminar in 2013, hosting a banquet for Dr. Al-Fanisan, and posting tweets calling for the release of prisoners of conscience, as well as possessing two books allegedly banned. The Public Prosecution brought vague charges against him, including supporting terrorist ideology, endorsing a banned group, and harboring extremist thought, despite the alleged evidence consisting only of a personal statement containing general information that did not prove any crime. Dr. Asiri emphasized that his academic activities and the books he owned were part of his scholarly work. Despite the absence of any legal evidence to substantiate the charges, the Specialized Criminal Court sentenced him to 23 years in prison, with an equivalent travel ban, the confiscation of his phone, and the closure of his X account.

•Saudi authorities arrested Dr. Rashid bin Hassan, a professor at King Khalid University, on July 8, 2021, for attending an authorized seminar nine years earlier titled «Freedom Between Slogan and Reality» and possessing a jurisprudential book titled «From the Guidance of Islam.» The Public Prosecution brought vague charges against him, including supporting terrorist ideology and harboring extremists, despite his clarification that he only attended the seminar and had no role in organizing it or knowledge of the attendees. Despite his medically documented health issues, the judge denied his request for temporary release. The Specialized Criminal Court issued a harsh sentence of 9 years in prison, along with an equivalent travel ban.

•Authorities arrested Dr. Qasim Al-Qathardi, a retired professor at King Khalid University, on July 8, 2021, for attending a licensed seminar held before the anti-terrorism law was enacted and possessing two books: «So That There Is No Sedition» by Ghazi Al-Qusaibi and «Existentialism.» The Public Prosecution brought broad and vague charges against him, including supporting terrorist ideology and harboring extremists, claiming that his possession of the books undermined social cohesion, despite the books being publicly available for sale and containing no incitement. Al-Qathardi denied all charges, pointing out the invalidity of the evidence and its reliance on baseless assumptions. Despite his request for temporary release due to his advanced age and family responsibilities, his request was denied. The court issued a harsh sentence of 8 years in prison, along with an equivalent travel ban.

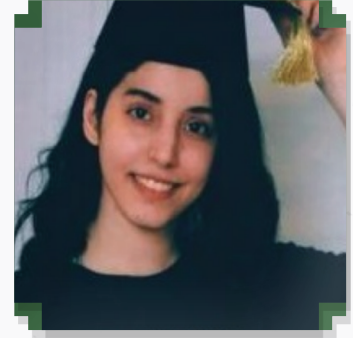
For more information, read SANAD's report on the Abha Detainees: [83-Year Prison Sentence for Five Individuals Simply for Attending a Public Seminar Held 10 Years Ago](#)

The Feminist Activist: Manahel Al-Otaibi

The Specialized Criminal Court issued a ruling sentencing feminist activist Manahel Al-Otaibi to 11 years in prison on charges related to freedom of expression and advocating for women's rights.

On January 9, 2024, the Specialized Criminal Court (also known as the Terrorism Court) sentenced Miss Al-Otaibi to 11 years in prison after finding her guilty of terrorism-related crimes, as alleged by the court.

Al-Otaibi had been summoned by the authorities in November 2022 to the Press Police Center in Riyadh, where she was transferred the same day to Al-Malaz Prison. She was then subjected to enforced disappearance from November 2023 until she managed to communicate with a family member on April 14, 2024. During this communication, she reported enduring harsh detention conditions and revealed that she had suffered a broken leg.





V. Timid Releases Amid International Pressure

Hundreds Still Held in Arbitrary Detention

In a move seen as an attempt to ease international pressure, Saudi authorities have carried out limited releases of some detainees in recent months. While any step that contributes to ending the suffering of detainees is welcomed, these releases remain timid and insufficient given the large number of detainees still behind bars for no reason other than expressing their opinions or calling for reform.

Documented human rights reports indicate that hundreds of political detainees in Saudi Arabia remain in arbitrary detention, including scholars, journalists, and human rights activists, whom the authorities have so far refused to release.

Below is a list of releases carried out by the Saudi government in 2024:

Hamza Al-Salem

In early 2024, Saudi authorities released economist Dr. Hamza Al-Salem after more than three years of arbitrary detention. Despite his release, Dr. Al-Salem remains subject to a travel ban. His arrest dates back to November 2020, following his criticism of Vision 2030.



Abdullah Almalki

In October, Saudi authorities released writer Abdullah Al-Maliki after seven years of detention. He was arrested in September 2017 and was held until the completion of his sentence in September 2024. His arrest was linked to his support for members of the «HASM» association and his public stance against normalization.



Rabea Hafiz

On July 25, Saudi authorities released singer Rabea Hafeeth after he spent nearly seven years in prison. He was arrested during the September 2017 crackdown without any legal justification.

Although Saudi authorities had issued an unjust sentence of three years, he ended up serving more than six years in prison. During his detention, he faced numerous violations, including solitary confinement and being placed in a dark cell, which caused him severe psychological harm. He was also forced to appear on a media channel to thank his jailers as part of a campaign to whitewash the image of Saudi prisons.



Fawzan Al-Harbi

In early November, Saudi authorities released human rights activist Fowzan Al-Harbi after he completed his ten-year sentence, which began with his arrest in December 2013. Al-Harbi was detained due to his activism in defending human rights and his involvement in founding the Civil and Political Rights Association (HASM).



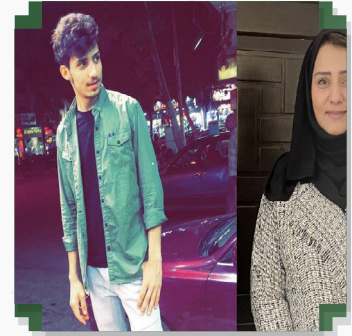
Sheikh Saleh Al-Shami

On November 19, Saudi authorities released Sheikh Saleh Al-Shami, a prominent 89-year-old Syrian scholar, after detaining him since January 2023 without any legal justification or formal charges.



Samira Al-Houri and her son Ahmed Al-Hilili

In July 2024, Saudi authorities released Yemeni human rights activist Samira Al-Houri and her son Ahmed Al-Hilili after more than two years of arbitrary detention. Al-Houri and her son were arrested on April 17, 2022, from their residence in Saudi Arabia and were held in enforced disappearance until their release.



Dr. Mohammed Al-Habdan

In December, Saudi authorities released academic and researcher Dr. Mohammed Abdullah Al-Habdan after more than seven years of detention since September 2017, without any legal justification. Dr. Al-Habdan was arrested after security forces raided his home in what was described as a brutal manner and without a judicial order. He was later subjected to a secret trial, during which he was denied his most basic rights, including the right to legal representation.



Dr. Malik Al-Ahmed

In December, Saudi authorities released academic and media figure Dr. Malik Al-Ahmad after more than seven years in detention. He was arrested on September 19, 2017, when security forces stormed his home without any legal justification.



Dr. Mohammed Al-Khudairi

In December, Saudi authorities released Dr. Mohammed Al-Khudairi after more than seven years of arbitrary detention. He was arrested in September 2017 without any legal justification.



Jamil Farsi

In October, Saudi authorities released writer and economic expert Jamil Farsi, who had been detained since September 2017 for expressing his reformist views and criticizing the management of economic affairs in Saudi Arabia. His release came one month after the completion of his arbitrary seven-year sentence.



The Sudanese Journalist: Ahmed Abdelkader

In November, Saudi authorities released Sudanese journalist Ahmed Abdelkader after three and a half years of detention. He was arrested on April 19, 2021, upon his arrival at King Abdulaziz Airport in Jeddah.



His arrest was linked to his criticism of Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's policies and interventions in Sudanese affairs, which he expressed through his Twitter account and statements to media outlets.

Dr. Sultan Al-Jumairi

In June, Saudi authorities released Dr. Sultan Al-Jumairi, who had been detained since September 12, 2018. Dr. Al-Jumairi was lured back to Saudi Arabia while residing in Canada, after being assured of his safety to return. However, the Saudi government immediately arrested him upon his arrival at the airport in the Kingdom.



Ahmed Al-Suyan

In June, Saudi authorities released Ahmed Al-Suyan after more than three years of completion of his sentence in September 2020. He was arrested in September 2017 without any legal justification.





VI. Hamad Al-Neyl Abu Kassawy

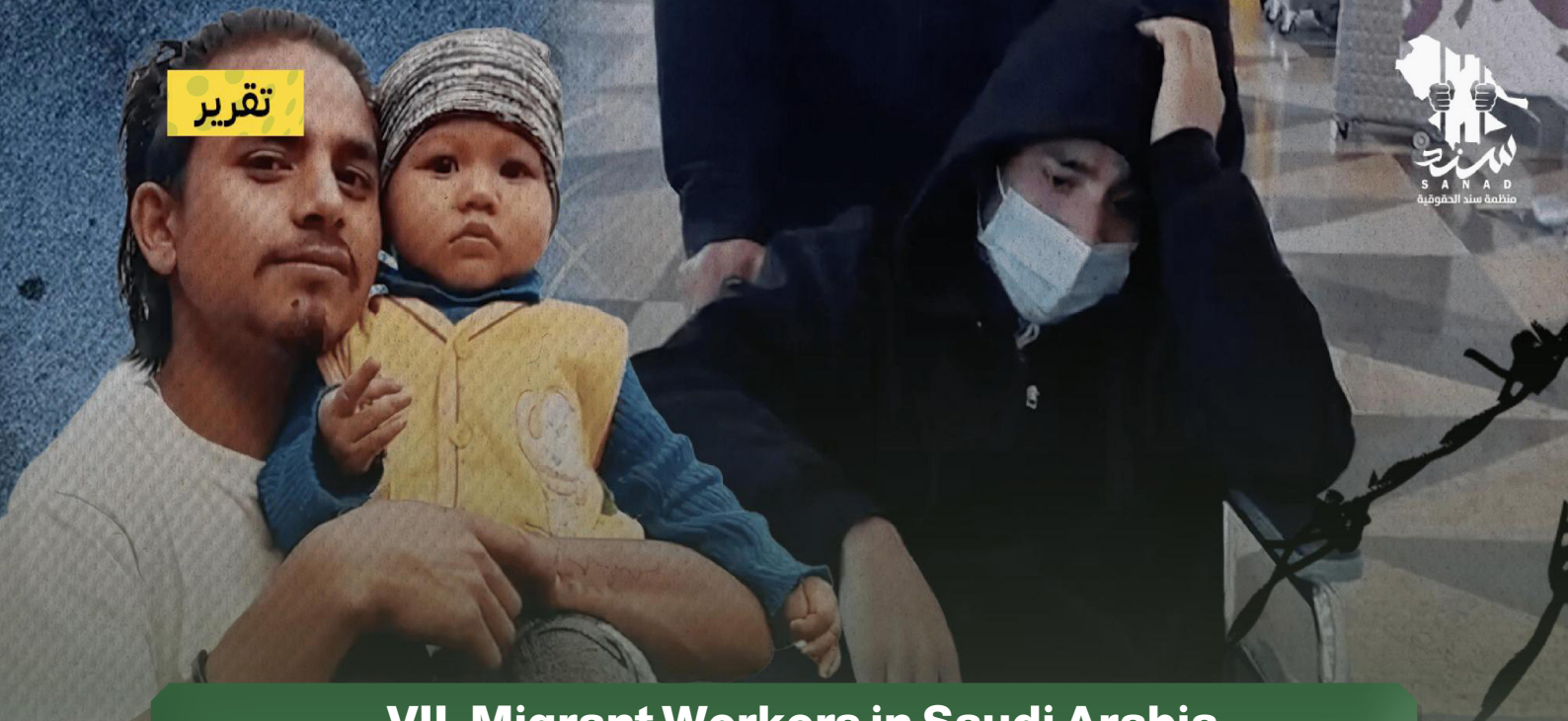
Nine Years of Imprisonment, Torture, and Abuse Without Charges

In an exclusive interview with SANAD, Sudanese citizen Hamad Al-Neyl Abu Kassawy Muhammed Al-Noor, who spent nine years in Saudi prisons without any legal justification, revealed the violations he endured during his detention. His ordeal began in 2004 when he was detained at Medina Airport during a transit trip to perform Umrah. He was taken for interrogation on charges of «suspicion,» which were never clarified to him.

During his detention, Abu Kassawy was subjected to systematic torture, including prolonged solitary confinement, beatings, suspension, sleep deprivation, and complete isolation from his family. He was also denied communication with his country's embassy. These violations persisted despite the absence of any evidence justifying his detention. Despite repeated attempts to inquire about the reasons for his arrest, his efforts were met with rejection and violence.

After nine years of detention, he was brought to trial and acquitted due to a lack of incriminating evidence, leading to his release. However, the authorities imposed an additional year of house arrest before allowing him to leave the country, extending his suffering to a full decade. During this period, he was transferred between five different prisons, where he endured some of the most inhumane treatment. His case stands as a stark example of the violations committed by Saudi authorities against detainees.

For more details, read SANAD's report on the case: [Hamad Al-Neyl Abu Kassawy - Nine Years of Imprisonment, Torture, and Abuse Without Charges](#)



VII. Migrant Workers in Saudi Arabia

Exploitation, Abuse, and Death

The previous year witnessed the continuation of severe violations of workers' rights in Saudi Arabia, with many workers, particularly migrant workers, subjected to harsh working conditions and inhumane practices. These violations included long working hours without fair compensation, wage theft, unsanitary living conditions, and a lack of legal safeguards to protect their basic rights. Additionally, many workers labor without health insurance, and the kafala (sponsorship) system remains a heavy burden, restricting their freedom to move or change jobs without their employer's permission. This has perpetuated a cycle of exploitation and abuse.

Under the rule of Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, violations against migrant workers' rights have worsened. Despite his promises of reform and openness, these abuses have continued to escalate. No meaningful steps have been taken to address or abolish the kafala system, which lies at the heart of these violations.

It is worth mentioning that direct responsibility lies with Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, who has focused his efforts on improving his international image through promotional projects like NEOM and hosting the 2034 World Cup, while neglecting fundamental humanitarian issues within Saudi Arabia. This makes him complicit in the oppression and exploitation of millions of migrant workers.

The Death of Nepali Worker Raju in Saudi Arabia – The Dark Side of Vision 2030 Projects

Under harsh working conditions, amid deliberate medical neglect, and in the face of unjustified disregard for workers' basic rights, Nepali worker Raju died in Saudi Arabia. This incident has shed light on a recurring human tragedy faced by workers in the Kingdom, where thousands of deaths among laborers have been recorded.

Raju arrived in Saudi Arabia in good health, but he developed serious kidney problems just two months after his arrival. Despite repeatedly filing complaints with his manager, his pleas were met with neglect and accusations of feigning illness. His health gradually deteriorated as the company refused to provide treatment or allow him to return to his country. When he requested to go back, his sponsor imposed impossible financial conditions, forcing him to continue working despite his illness. His suffering ended with his death, as he was only taken to the hospital after he had already passed away. Authorities claimed the death was due to «heart failure from unknown causes.»

For more details, read SANAD's report on the case: [The Death of Nepali Worker Raju in Saudi Arabia - Neglect of Migrant Workers' Rights and a Humanitarian Disregard Demanding Accountability](#)



VIII. Justice Lost in the Storm

The Saudi legal system witnesses clear violations of the fundamental rights guaranteed by domestic law. These violations are evident in the practices of investigative authorities and courts, particularly towards political detainees, amid a complete absence of real oversight to prevent arbitrary detention in the first place, as well as the grave violations they endure in prisons.

Among the legal provisions violated in Saudi Arabia is Article 4 of the Criminal Procedure Law, which stipulates the accused's right to legal representation by a lawyer or agent during investigation and trial—a fundamental right essential for ensuring justice. However, this right is systematically denied to political detainees, who are prevented from exercising their right to legal representation, in clear violation of both domestic law and international covenants. Additionally, Article 182, which guarantees the immediate notification of verdicts to the convicted, is also violated. Authorities have arrested several citizens under the pretext of notifying detainees of their sentences.

On the other hand, authorities violate Article 52 of the Criminal Procedure Law, which prohibits nighttime searches except in cases of necessity. For example, Al-Hazmi was subjected to a brutal arrest and a nighttime home search without legal justification, despite not being a fugitive or under pursuit. Additionally, Article 38 of the Governance System, which states that punishment is personal and can only be imposed based on a legal or regulatory provision, is also violated. Vague charges are often brought without conclusive evidence or clear identification of the accused.

The scope of violations extends to include Articles 2, 3, 9, and 35 of the Criminal Procedure Law, which prohibit physical and psychological torture, affirm that penalties can only be imposed after a conviction is proven, guarantee the right to appeal verdicts, and prohibit arrests without an order from the competent authority except in cases of being caught red-handed/flagrante delicto. These ongoing violations reflect a serious regression in the Saudi system's commitment to domestic laws and the fundamental principles of international justice.



IX. Kingdom of Silence

Journalism Under Mohammed bin Salman's

According to the 2024 Press Freedom Index released by Reporters Without Borders, Saudi Arabia ranks 166 out of 180 countries, reflecting a grim reality for freedom of expression. Despite a slight improvement compared to 2023, when it ranked 170, the decline relative to 2022 when it also ranked 166, highlights the persistence of systematic repressive practices aimed at silencing dissent and stifling a free press.

The repression is not limited to preventing journalists from practicing their profession freely; these policies extend to imprisoning them. Many Saudi journalists, such as Mohammed Alhazza, Osama Suhaili, Sami Al-Thubaiti, and Wajdi Al-Ghazzawi, have been behind bars for years without fair trials or clear charges.

Moreover, social media has not escaped the repressive grip of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman. Authorities issue harsh sentences, including imprisonment or even the death penalty, for simple tweets or personal comments. A prominent example is the execution of Saudi citizen Zafer Al-Shahri for a tweet expressing his opinion, as well as the death sentence initially handed to Mohammed bin Nasser Al-Ghamdi, later reduced to 30 years in prison under intense international pressure. Similarly, Noura Al-Qahtani was sentenced to 45 years in prison for tweets from a pseudonymous account, alongside countless others targeted for expressing their views.

The Crown Prince's repression has profoundly impacted the media landscape, where only the voice of the regime is heard while dissenting voices and alternative narratives are silenced. There is no room for open dialogue, making Saudi Arabia under Prince Mohammed bin Salman a model of a one-voice state. In this reality, all other voices are stifled, either in the darkness of prisons or under the weight of fear of retaliation.



X. The Illusion of Reforms in Saudi Arabia

Women's Rights Between False Promises and Ongoing Abuses

Women's rights in Saudi Arabia continue to face significant challenges in 2024. Despite promises of reform announced over the past years and some legislative changes and superficial reforms, the reality points to ongoing grave violations of women's rights, including arbitrary arrests and systematic discrimination in various aspects of life.

SANAD has documented the continued detention of dozens of women for their peaceful activism and advocacy for human rights. It has also documented Saudi authorities' use of Aida Al-Ghamdi's arrest to blackmail her son, Abdullah Al-Ghamdi, a Saudi dissident residing in London. Additionally, Sara Al-Jabri remains detained as retaliation against her father, a former Saudi official living in Canada. Furthermore, authorities sentenced Manahil Al-Otaibi to 11 years in prison on charges related to freedom of expression and advocating for women's rights.

Saudi authorities use various methods to pressure female activists in prisons, including enforced disappearance, psychological and physical torture, and forcing their partners to divorce them, as was the case with Salma Al-Shehab.



XI. Sportswashing in Saudi Arabia

A Sporting Facade Hiding Repression and Freedom Violations

Sportswashing is a strategy employed by Saudi Arabia to rebrand itself on the global stage as an open and modern nation while facing widespread accusations of human rights violations. For years, the Kingdom has pumped billions of dollars into major sporting events, such as hosting Formula 1 races, purchasing European football clubs, organizing global boxing championships, and acquiring star players. However, these activities are nothing more than a facade, concealing a dark reality of repression and the stifling of freedoms.

Sportswashing is a strategy employed by Saudi Arabia to rebrand itself on the global stage as an open and modern nation while facing widespread accusations of human rights violations. For years, the Kingdom has pumped billions of dollars into major sporting events, such as hosting Formula 1 races, taking over European football clubs, organizing global boxing championships, and recruiting top-tier athletes. However, these activities are nothing more than a facade, concealing a dark reality of repression and the stifling of freedoms.

In 2024, Saudi authorities continued to exploit sports as a means to whitewash their deteriorating human rights record and improve their international image. Among the most notable recent attempts is Saudi Arabia's bid to host the 2034 World Cup, a move aimed at diverting attention from the ongoing violations against activists and dissidents both inside and outside the country.

These attempts, including the bid to host the World Cup, coincide with ongoing arbitrary arrests, unfair trials, and systematic restrictions on freedom of expression. Hundreds of political and human rights activists remain imprisoned, and independent voices are heavily suppressed. Despite the promotion of an alleged image of «reform,» repressive practices, including death sentences and secret trials, reveal the true reality of the situation in Saudi Arabia.

In December 2024, human rights suffered a significant setback following FIFA's decision to grant Saudi Arabia the right to host the 2034 World Cup without considering its human rights record. This decision reflects negligence on the part of FIFA and the international community, as these entities should have taken moral responsibility to ensure that human rights are a fundamental part of the criteria for hosting major sporting events.



XII. Saudi Authorities' Disregard for the WGAD Decisions

A Persistent Breach of International Standards

The United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention has issued a series of decisions in recent years condemning the Saudi authorities and exposing their practices of arbitrary arrests and severe human rights violations. The group has called for the release of all detainees with clear rulings issued in their favor, including Dr. Awad al-Qarni, Dr. Salman al, Ouda, Dr. Safar al-Hawali, and his sons, as well as elderly woman Aida al-Ghamdi and her son Adel al-Ghamdi, among others. Despite this, the authorities have failed to comply, completely disregarding these decisions in a blatant defiance of international standards and human rights.

All the cases reviewed by the UN Working Group led to the condemnation of the Saudi authorities. The panel's rulings exposed violations, including arrests carried out without judicial warrants, the detention of activists and intellectuals on vague or unspecified charges, and the lack of fair legal processes. The international decisions also highlighted instances of torture and inhumane treatment during detention, as well as the confinement of individuals in conditions that fail to meet global standards.

Saudi Arabia's disregard for the decisions of the UN Working Group not only endangers the lives of arbitrarily detained individuals but also casts a shadow over its international credibility and demonstrates its failure to adhere to international law. The international community must unite and exert greater pressure on Saudi Arabia to ensure the immediate release of those arbitrarily detained, investigate cases of torture and violations, and hold those responsible for these crimes accountable.

The Decision Of The United Nations Working Group On Arbitrary Detention (WGAD) Regarding Mr. Mohammed Nasser Al-Ghamdi

In July 2024, the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, under the Human Rights Council, issued a decision affirming that the detention of Mr. Mohammed bin Nasser Al-Ghamdi is arbitrary and violates his fundamental human rights, necessitating his immediate release and the provision of appropriate compensation.

In its decision, the Working Group stated that the deprivation of Al-Ghamdi's liberty violates Articles 3, 9, 10, 11, and 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This deprivation falls under categories II and III and is considered a crime against humanity. Consequently, the appropriate remedy is the immediate release of Mohammed Al-Ghamdi, along with granting him the necessary compensation and entitlements.

The Working Group on Arbitrary Detention emphasized that the tweets posted by Mr. Mohammed Al-Ghamdi on Twitter, which led to his arrest, fall under the protection of peaceful freedom of expression guaranteed by Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Therefore, his arrest and subsequent trial should not have occurred. Nevertheless, his trial proceeded, with the Working Group emphasizing that the legal proceedings against Al-Ghamdi violated the conditions of a fair and lawful trial.

The decision affirmed that Mr. Al-Ghamdi's right to legal assistance and to appoint a lawyer of his choice during his detention was violated. The authorities appointed a lawyer for Al-Ghamdi themselves, which significantly undermined his ability to defend himself in any judicial proceedings. Additionally, Al-Ghamdi was not granted adequate time to prepare his defense.

The Working Group urged the Saudi government to ensure a full and independent investigation into the circumstances surrounding the arbitrary arrest and deprivation of liberty of Mr. Al-Ghamdi and to take appropriate measures against those responsible for violating his rights.

The Working Group also found that the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has violated its international human rights obligations in more than 75 cases. It expressed concern that this indicates a widespread and systematic pattern of arbitrary detention in the country, amounting to a serious breach of international law. The Working Group noted that, under certain circumstances, widespread or systematic imprisonment or severe deprivation of liberty may violate international legal norms and constitute crimes against humanity.

The Working Group requested both Al-Ghamdi's legal attorney and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to provide information within six months regarding whether Saudi Arabia has complied with the recommendations outlined in this decision and to furnish details on the measures taken to execute it.

Despite the passing of the deadline set by the UN Working Group for the Saudi authorities to release Mohammed Al-Ghamdi, the authorities have not complied. Instead, they have revoked the death sentence and replaced it with a 30-year prison term, a move that represents yet another defiance of international law.



XIII. The Stateless (Bedoon) in Saudi Arabia

A Forgotten Human Rights Issue and Ongoing Government Neglect

The issue of the stateless, or Bedoon, in Saudi Arabia stands as one of the most prominent human rights cases exposing government neglect and the systematic denial of rights for thousands of individuals living without any legal identity. Despite repeated government promises to resolve this issue, the Bedoon minority continues to suffer from marginalization and exclusion in a country that is supposed to be their homeland. The lack of political will by Saudi authorities has exacerbated their suffering, turning their lives into a daily nightmare.

The Saudi government, instead of acknowledging the suffering of the Bedoons and taking steps to end it, continues to ignore this group, which is deprived of the most basic rights. Education, healthcare, employment, and legal recognition remain distant dreams for the Bedoons, who live in a state of isolation and deprivation. This systematic neglect by the state not only violates international human rights laws but also reflects the government's failure to achieve social justice and ensure the dignity of every individual living on its land.

Despite the issue spanning decades, the authorities have not taken serious steps or implemented comprehensive solutions to address the plight of the Bedoons. Instead, the government has adopted a policy of deliberate procrastination and empty promises, demonstrating a lack of concern for the scale of the tragedy endured by these individuals. The persistence of this neglect highlights the absence of transparency and accountability within the Saudi system and exposes the contradiction between its official rhetoric and actual practices.

SANAD has condemned this deliberate government neglect and continues to call on Saudi authorities to take immediate action to resolve this humanitarian issue. It urges the adoption of urgent and genuine measures to address the situation, including the establishment of clear legislation that grants the Bedoons the right to citizenship.

Recommendations

- 1- The Saudi regime must immediately cease confiscating freedoms and violating the rights of its citizens and residents, commit to respecting human rights, and guarantee the right to freedom of expression.
- 2- The Saudi regime must allow the freedom to form human rights organizations and engage in peaceful political activism without restrictions or persecution.
- 3- The Saudi regime must release all political prisoners and compensate them for all the harm they have endured.
- 4- The Saudi regime must ensure all rights for released detainees, granting them full freedom, including the right to travel, move, and work without restrictions.
- 5- The Saudi authorities must implement a comprehensive reform of the penal, judicial, and legal systems to ensure full justice for all citizens and residents.
- 6- The Saudi regime should halt executions targeting political dissidents, individuals expressing their opinions, and military personnel who criticize the Saudi government's policies or corruption within the military institution.
- 7- The Human Rights Commission in Saudi Arabia should carry out its human rights role independently and effectively, siding with the victims rather than justifying or covering up the violations committed by the regime.
- 8- The Saudi regime must take all necessary measures to ensure the safety of pilgrims and prevent the recurrence of the catastrophes witnessed during previous Hajj seasons.
- 9- The Saudi authorities must reform labor laws and take serious measures to protect workers' rights, preventing all forms of exploitation and violations against them.
- 10- SANAD Human Rights Organization urges citizens in Saudi Arabia to report all cases of violations, including arbitrary arrests, and to raise their voices to demand the release of all detainees.
- 11- The Saudi authorities should take serious measures to address the issue of domestic violence, provide full support to women who are victims of violence, and ensure their protection.
- 12- SANAD calls on the international community and human rights organizations to continue exerting pressure on the Saudi government until human rights violations cease completely.



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of Executions and
Fatal Neglect