

18 September 2020

We are a global coalition of human rights and peace organizations deeply concerned by your participation in the 2020 G20 Summit, hosted by the government of Saudi Arabia. Your office is a participant in the G20's "Urban 20" summit of mayors, which Saudi Arabia will convene between September 30 and October 2, the second anniversary of the murder of Saudi dissident and U.S. resident Jamal Khashoggi.

Saudi Arabia's government is an unfit and inappropriate host for the 2020 G20 summit and Urban 20 convening. As an absolute monarchy without any form of meaningful democratic representation, the Saudi government has a long record of silencing the very voices that are necessary for a meaningful global conversation regarding the massive challenges we collectively face. Saudi Arabia's brutal record has only intensified since Mohammed bin Salman became crown prince in 2017.

We urge you to withdraw from Saudi Arabia's G20 and Urban 20 proceedings this year. We urge you to publicly demand that the Saudi government take clear and immediate steps towards ending its record of human rights violations, reckless foreign policy, and environmental destruction. These steps should include releasing prisoners of conscience, accountability for the murder of Jamal Khashoggi, and ending its war in Yemen.

Today, human rights and civil society norms are under threat across the world. G20 delegations have an obligation to ensure that G20 convenings are not used by host governments to obscure or hide their own repressive and environmentally destructive practices. Over 200 non-governmental organizations worldwide have already declared that they will not participate in a Saudi-led G20 process that *"seeks to give international legitimacy to a state that provides virtually no space for civil society, and where independent civil society voices are not tolerated."* Notable signatories of this statement include Amnesty International, Transparency International, CIVICUS, Freedom Forward, and Human Rights Watch.

**Before Saudi Arabia's government can be considered an appropriate host for the G20 and Urban 20 summits, the Saudi government should take the following immediate steps towards reform:**

**Tell the Truth About the Murder of Jamal Khashoggi:**

Saudi Arabia has failed to provide any meaningful accountability for the murder of exiled Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi in Turkey by Saudi government agents in October 2018. A recent trial in Saudi Arabia regarding Khashoggi's murder was described by Amnesty International as a "whitewash." Saudi Arabia must accept an independent international criminal investigation into his murder.

**Release Human Rights Advocates from Prison:**

Saudi Arabia must stop imprisoning, torturing, and killing advocates for human rights and political reform. The government must release Islamic scholar Salman Alodah, aid worker Abdulrahman al-Sadhan, human right advocate Waleed Abu al-Khair, the imprisoned members of the Saudi Association for Civil and Political Rights (ACPRA), and all prisoners of conscience.

### **Free Women's Rights Activists and Stop Violating Women's Rights:**

Saudi Arabia must release imprisoned women's rights activists Loujain al-Hathloul, Samar Badawi, Naseema al-Sada, Nouf Abdulaziz, and Maya al-Zahrani, as well as imprisoned men who have advocated for women's rights. Charges must also be dropped against all women's rights advocates.

Saudi Arabia should abolish the male guardianship system, as well as the laws that discriminate against women or give husbands absolute control over their lives. Saudi Arabia should reform its domestic violence law, including to make clear that marital rape is a crime.

### **Abolish the Death Penalty:**

Saudi Arabia is among the countries carrying out the highest number of executions in the world. 2019 witnessed the largest number of executions in recent Saudi history, with 185 individuals executed. The Saudi authorities apply the death penalty for a wide range of non-violent offences that do not meet the international threshold of "most serious crimes," including drug-related crimes and apostasy. Saudi authorities continue to impose the death penalty on individuals under the age of 18.

### **Allow Independent Media and Journalists to Report Freely:**

Saudi Arabia permits no independent media and is one of the world's worst jailers of journalists. The government regularly jails those who express critical thoughts on social media. The number of journalists and citizen-journalists in detention has tripled since the start of 2017, and 26 journalists were imprisoned by Saudi Arabia as of 2019.

### **Abolish the Sponsorship System of Modern-Day Slavery:**

Under Saudi Arabia's sponsorship ("kafala") system, foreign workers face significant risks of abuse and even conditions amounting to forced labor and modern-day slavery. This system also applies to foreign spouses, who have been trapped in Saudi Arabia against their will.

### **Embrace Religious Freedom:**

Foreigners comprise 30 percent of Saudi Arabia's population, but Saudi Arabia does not allow public worship by non-Muslims. The Saudi government represses and discriminates against its Shia Muslim minority, and the government beheaded 37 individuals, the majority of whom were Shia, in a 2019 mass execution.

### **Stop Driving the Climate Crisis:**

State-owned Saudi Aramco is the world's largest contributor to global greenhouse gas emissions among corporate fossil fuel producers. Saudi Arabia also has an extensive record of undermining global climate negotiations. Saudi Arabia must end its climate obstruction and commit to a dramatic reduction in its fossil fuel exports.

**Stop Intervening Against Democracy:**

Saudi Arabia has blocked democracy movements and advanced dictatorships across the Middle East and North Africa, including in Libya, Bahrain, Sudan, and Egypt.

**End the Saudi-led War in Yemen:**

Saudi Arabia has bombed, blockaded, starved, and slaughtered thousands of Yemeni civilians in its war in Yemen. Yemen's healthcare system is now decimated, giving rise to a lethal spread of the coronavirus pandemic across the Yemeni population. Saudi Arabia must end its war in Yemen.

**Conclusion:**

Governments, businesses, and civil society organizations invited to participate in the Saudi-led G20 proceedings should demand dramatic changes to Saudi Arabia's dismal record of human rights violations, repression, war, and environmental destruction. We urge you and all G20 participants to withdraw from the Saudi-led G20 and Urban 20 summits and commit to making human rights reforms a condition of all future dealings with Saudi Arabia's government.

Sincerely,

Action Corps  
ALQST for Human Rights  
Americans for Democracy & Human Rights in Bahrain  
CIVICUS  
CODEPINK  
Democracy for the Arab World Now (DAWN)  
Freedom Forward  
Health Alliance International  
Institute for Policy Studies Climate Policy Program  
Just Foreign Policy  
MENA Rights Group  
Western New York Peace Center  
Yemen Relief and Reconstruction Foundation

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## **Additional Background Regarding Saudi Arabia's Record**

### **Undermining Justice for Jamal Khashoggi:**

Saudi Arabia has failed to provide any meaningful accountability for the murder of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi by Saudi government agents in October 2018. Agnes Callamard, the UN Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary killings, has reported that Mr. Khashoggi was the victim of a premeditated extrajudicial execution, for which the government of Saudi Arabia is responsible.

A recent trial in Saudi Arabia regarding Khashoggi's murder was described by Amnesty International as a "whitewash" that was "closed to the public and to independent monitors." Even the low level officials who were convicted in the sham trial were subsequently "pardoned" by Salah Khashoggi, Jamal's eldest son who himself has been subject to a travel ban in the country.

### **Jailing and Killing Human Rights Advocates:**

Saudi Arabia's government has imprisoned, tortured, and even killed many nonviolent advocates for human rights and political reform. Scores of human rights defenders, journalists, and other prisoners of conscience are detained for exercising their rights to freedom of expression, assembly, and association. Many have been subjected to torture and ill-treatment in detention, without anyone held to account. The Saudi authorities must release all those detained for exercising these rights immediately.

To cite just a few examples: Islamic scholar Salman Alodah is now facing the death penalty for calling on Saudi Arabia to end its diplomatic standoff with Qatar. 36-year-old aid worker Abdulrahman al-Sadhan was disappeared by security forces two years ago. Human rights advocate Waleed Abu al-Khair has been imprisoned on a 15-year sentence. All eleven members of the human rights organization Saudi Association for Civil and Political Rights (ACPRA) have been detained or imprisoned. ACPRA founder Dr. Abdullah al-Hamid died in April following a stroke and medical neglect in a Saudi prison. On top of this, the government regularly jails and/or imposes travel bans on the children or relatives of activists and critical writers. Saudi human rights defenders, writers, and journalists based outside Saudi Arabia also face Saudi government surveillance and threats.

### **Imprisoning Women's Rights Activists and Violating Women's Rights:**

Saudi Arabia must release imprisoned women's rights activists Loujain al-Hathloul, Samar Badawi, Naseema al-Sada, Nouf Abdulaziz, and Maya al-Zahrani, several of whom have been reportedly tortured. Other women's rights activists are also facing ongoing persecution and trumped-up legal charges. Saudi Arabia must also release the imprisoned men who have advocated for women's rights.

Saudi Arabia should fully dismantle the male guardianship system, including the requirement that women obtain permission from their male guardian to marry, and amend its laws that discriminate against women in divorce, child custody, and inheritance. It should also abolish laws that grant a husband absolute control and legal decision-making authority over a wife's life. Saudi Arabia should amend its domestic violence law so as to adopt [the UN definition for violence against women](#), to enable protection of survivors, deterrence of perpetrators, and to make clear that marital rape is a crime.

### **Sponsorship System of Modern-Day Slavery:**

Under Saudi Arabia's sponsorship ("kafala") system, foreign workers face significant risks of abuse and even conditions amounting to forced labor and modern-day slavery. This is because foreign workers are effectively not free to leave their jobs. Foreign workers' visas and permissions to reside in Saudi Arabia are tied to their particular employers, and they require the permission of their employment sponsors to leave the country, change jobs, and keep their status in the country legal. Employers routinely confiscate workers' passports. Foreign women domestic workers face additional risks of gender-based and sexual violence, as they are confined to their employers homes and often lack private sleeping quarters. This system also applies to foreign spouses and impacts foreign women who remain vulnerable to abuse when in Saudi Arabia as dependents of foreign husbands or fathers who are sponsored to work in the country.

### **Violating Religious Freedom:**

Foreigners comprise some 30 percent of the country's population, but Saudi Arabia does not allow public worship by non-Muslims. Houses of worship other than mosques are banned, and Saudi security services have broken up private worship services of non-Muslims. The government represses and discriminates against its Shia Muslim minority, who make up at least ten percent of the population. The Saudi government beheaded 37 individuals, the majority of whom were Shia, in a 2019 mass execution.

### **Intervening Against Democracy:**

Saudi Arabia has blocked democracy movements and supported authoritarian regimes across the Middle East and North Africa. Saudi Arabia has backed warlord Khalifa Haftar's drive to reinstate dictatorship in Libya, sent troops into Bahrain to crush the country's pro-democracy movement, promoted military rule for Sudan, and helped finance the military coup of Egypt's brutal autocrat Abdel Fattah el-Sisi.

### **Driving the Climate Crisis:**

State-owned Saudi Aramco is the world's largest contributor to global greenhouse gas emissions among corporate fossil fuel producers. Saudi Arabia's government also has an extensive record of undermining global climate negotiations. Saudi Arabia must end its climate obstruction and commit to a dramatic reduction in its fossil fuel exports.

Saudi Arabia should phase out its oil and gas production and fossil fuel exports in line with the rate of reduction required to meet the Paris Climate Agreement target of a 1.5 degrees Celsius global average temperature increase. Saudi actions and negotiating positions in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) process must be consistent with the principle of "[common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities](#)." This means that as a wealthy country and a large current and cumulative greenhouse gas emitter, Saudi Arabia has a disproportionately large responsibility to both reduce its own emissions and to provide climate mitigation, adaptation, and loss and damage assistance to Global South countries. Saudi Arabia's negotiating positions must not undermine this fundamental principle of the UNFCCC process."