



**MENA**  
Rights  
Group



# **Saudi Arabia**

## **Alternative Report**

*Report submitted to the Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women and Girls in the context of the fifth periodic review of Saudi Arabia.*

**September 2024**

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# 1. Introduction

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This joint shadow report, submitted by MENA Rights Group and ALQST for Human Rights, contains information on the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women and Girls (CEDAW), including comments on the State reply<sup>1</sup> to the list of issues<sup>2</sup> and information on the implementation by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia of the previous Concluding Observations of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (the Committee).<sup>3</sup>

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has consistently upheld a progressive stance on the advancement of women's rights in the country. It regularly emphasises the reforms and changes undertaken to protect and promote women's rights. The findings in this report show a different reality.

According to our findings and based on testimonies and documentation collected by submitting organisations, women have increasingly been targeted by authorities for criticising discriminatory laws such as the personal status law. They have been subjected to enforced disappearance, arbitrary detention, and torture in the form of sexual harassment and other sexual abuses.

Therefore, submitting organisations find that the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has failed to comply with the binding obligations of the CEDAW and to implement the Committee's 2018 Concluding Observations.

## 2. Persecution of Women Human Rights Defenders

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<sup>1</sup> Committee on the elimination of Discrimination Against Women, *Replies of Saudi Arabia to the list of issues and questions in relation to its fifth periodic report*, 14 May 2024, CEDAW/C/SAU/RQ/5, [https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/\\_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/SessionDetails1.aspx?SessionID=2715&Language=en](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/SessionDetails1.aspx?SessionID=2715&Language=en), (accessed on 21 August 2024).

<sup>2</sup> Committee on the elimination of Discrimination Against Women, *List of issues and questions in relation to the fifth periodic report of Saudi Arabia*, 14 November 2023, CEDAW/C/SAU/Q/5, [https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/\\_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/SessionDetails1.aspx?SessionID=2715&Language=en](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/SessionDetails1.aspx?SessionID=2715&Language=en), (accessed on 21 August 2024).

<sup>3</sup> Committee on the elimination of Discrimination Against Women, *Concluding Observations on the combined third and fourth periodic reports of Saudi Arabia*, 14 March 2018, CEDAW/C/SAU/3-4, <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/n18/070/62/pdf/n1807062.pdf> (accessed 4 September 2024).

Saudi domestic law does not provide for nor protect freedom of expression.<sup>4</sup> In practice, the authorities regulate and determine what speech is considered to “harm the state’s security”. In other words, the government can ban or suspend media outlets if it concludes that they violated the press law and journalists can be imprisoned for a variety of vaguely defined crimes and criminalise any form of peaceful dissent.

Freedom of expression is also severely restricted by other legislations, including the 2017 Counter-Terrorism Law and the 2007 Anti-Cybercrime Law, which have been increasingly used to prosecute peaceful expression and dissent.<sup>5</sup>

Women human rights defenders have been increasingly targeted by Saudi authorities and are particularly vulnerable to this legal framework, which is used to prosecute and silence them. It is on the basis of the Counter-Terrorism Law<sup>6</sup> and the Anti-Cybercrime Law<sup>7</sup> that Saudi courts give lengthy prison sentences to women human rights defenders for expressing dissent. For example, in 2022, Salma al-Shehab<sup>8</sup> and Nourah al-Qahtani<sup>9</sup> were each sentenced to 27 and 45 years in prison for expressing their criticism regarding reforms carried out by the Saudi government through Twitter. According to the UNWGD, both of their sentences are arbitrary and in violation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.<sup>10</sup>

Saudi authorities similarly targeted women human rights defender Maryam al-Otaibi<sup>11</sup> for her peaceful activism on social media and for taking part in a campaign against guardianship laws titled #IAmMyOwnGuardian.<sup>12</sup> In 2016, she had refused to obey her father who instructed her to retract a complaint of domestic violence she had filed against her brothers, after they verbally and physically abused her as retribution for her campaigning efforts. She was arrested on 18 April 2017 and later charged for “parental disobedience” following a complaint from her father.

<sup>4</sup> In particular, the Basic Law of Governance, which was enacted as an informal constitution in 1992, states that “[a]ll acts that foster sedition or division or harm the state's security and its public relations or detract from man's dignity and rights shall be prohibited.” You may access a translated version of the Basic Law on MENA Rights Group’s website: [https://menarights.org/sites/default/files/2016-12/KSA\\_Constitution\\_EN.pdf](https://menarights.org/sites/default/files/2016-12/KSA_Constitution_EN.pdf) (accessed on 6 August 2024).

<sup>5</sup> US Department of State, *2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Saudi Arabia*, 2023, p. 28, available at: <https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/saudi-arabia/#:~:text=On%20December%201%2C%20Amnesty%20International,the%20Saudi%20Shi'a%20minority> (accessed on 5 August 2024).

<sup>6</sup> You can find a version of this law in English on MENA Rights Group’s website: <https://menarights.org/en/documents/law-combating-crimes-terrorism-and-its-financing-2017>.

<sup>7</sup> You can find a version of this law in English on MENA Rights Group’s website: [https://menarights.org/sites/default/files/2016-12/KSA\\_CyberCrimeLaw\\_EN.pdf](https://menarights.org/sites/default/files/2016-12/KSA_CyberCrimeLaw_EN.pdf).

<sup>8</sup> MENA Rights Group, *Saudi academic Salma al-Shehab sentenced to 27 years in prison*, 29 August 2022, available at: <https://menarights.org/en/case/salma-al-shehab> (accessed on 6 August 2024).

<sup>9</sup> MENA Rights Group, *Nourah al-Qahtani serving a 45-year prison sentence over tweets*, 7 November 2022, available at: <https://menarights.org/en/case/nourah-al-qahtani> (accessed on 6 August 2024).

<sup>10</sup> UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, *Opinion No. 27/2023 concerning Salma bint Sami bin Abdulmohsen al-Shehab and Nourah bin Saeed al-Qahtani (Saudi Arabia)*, 19 June 2023, UN Doc. A/HRC/WGAD/2023/27.

<sup>11</sup> UN Special Procedures, *AL SAU 4/2017*, 6 April 2017, <https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownloadPublicCommunicationFile?gld=23057> (accessed 12 August 2024).

<sup>12</sup> Twitter, *#IAmMyOwnGuardian*, <https://twitter.com/search?q=%23IAmMyOwnGuardian&src=typd> (accessed 12 August 2024).

The case of Maryam al-Otaibi was never mentioned by any Saudi authority, nor by the Saudi Human Rights Commission and it has never been submitted as part of their national reporting to human rights mechanisms.

Maryam al-Otaibi's sister, Manahel al-Otaibi,<sup>13</sup> was also arrested on 16 November 2022 for having been vocal about female empowerment on her social media platforms. She was active on Snapchat, Twitter and Instagram where she shared fitness videos as well as peaceful posts advocating for liberal dress codes for women, LGBTQ+ rights and the abolition of the male guardianship system. Just like her sister, she was particularly vocal about violations of the fundamental rights of women within the kingdom and also used the hashtag #IAmMyOwnGuardian.

Since her arrest, she has been subjected to various forms of physical and psychological abuse, along with extended periods of incommunicado detention. From November 2023 to April 2024, she was prevented from having any contact with her family. In April 2024, she managed to call them, revealing that she was being held in inhumane conditions and placed in solitary confinement. During the call, she also explained that her leg was broken due to physical abuse and that she had been denied medical care. After that call, Manahel al-Otaibi was once again almost completely denied the right to contact her family. UN Special Procedures mandate holders issued a communication on al-Otaibi,<sup>14</sup> urging Saudi authorities to provide information on the legal grounds for her arrest and detention. In their reply, the Saudi government revealed that she had been sentenced on 9 January 2024 for "having committed terrorist offences punishable under articles 43 and 44 of the [2017 Counterterrorism Law]".<sup>15</sup>

Similarly, Loujain al-Hathloul,<sup>16</sup> a prominent Saudi women's rights activist, fearlessly protested against the male guardianship system and the driving ban imposed on women. On 27 February 2018, she attended a public meeting in Geneva to brief members of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women on the human rights situation of women in Saudi Arabia. Her briefing was part of the Committee's review of Saudi Arabia's implementation of the CEDAW.<sup>17</sup> In May 2018, Saudi authorities conducted a wave of arrest against several women human rights defenders, including al-Hathloul.<sup>18</sup> She was arrested on 15 May 2018 and was immediately detained until her conditional release in February 2021.<sup>19</sup> During the first

<sup>13</sup> MENA Rights Group, *Saudi women's right defender sentenced to 11 years in prison for social media activism*, 5 December 2023, available at: <https://menarights.org/en/case/manahel-al-otaibi> (accessed on 10 August 2024).

<sup>14</sup> UN Special Procedures, *AL/SAU/10/2023*, 1 December 2023, <https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownloadPublicCommunicationFile?gld=28627> (accessed 10 August 2024).

<sup>15</sup> Reply of the Government of Saudi Arabia to *AL/SAU/10/2023*, *HRC/NONE/2024/SP/6*, 25 January 2024, <https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownloadFile?gld=38102> (accessed 10 August 2024).

<sup>16</sup> Loujain al-Hathloul's website, *About Loujain*, <https://www.loujainalhathloul.org/about-loujain> (accessed 12 August 2024).

<sup>17</sup> Loujain al-Hathloul's website, *Activism*, <https://www.loujainalhathloul.org/activism>, (accessed 20 August 2024).

<sup>18</sup> ALQST, "Two years after the first wave of arrests of women human rights defenders in Saudi Arabia, we #StandWithSaudiHeroes and campaign for their release", 15 May 2020, <https://alqst.org/en/post/two-years-since-wave-of-arrests-of-WHRDs>, (accessed on 21 August 2024).

<sup>19</sup> MENA Rights Group, *Women's rights activist Loujain Al Hathloul conditionally released and facing*

six weeks of her detention, al-Hathloul was held in an unofficial detention facility, known as “the hotel” or “the officers’ guesthouse”, where she was brutally tortured by high-ranking state officials, including Saud al-Qahtani, then-advisor to the Royal Court. She was held in solitary confinement, beaten, electrocuted, sexually harassed and threatened with rape and murder. She is currently subject to an arbitrary travel ban, preventing her from leaving the country. This ban has also been unjustly extended to her family members, who have never faced any legal charges.

### 3. Travel bans

Women human rights defenders who have expressed criticism towards the government and its policies face the imposition of lengthy travel bans against them. Such travel bans are usually imposed as part of their sentence which prevent them from leaving Saudi Arabia. The length of travel bans most often range between 5 and 20 years. Article 10 of the Counter-Terrorism Law stipulates that :

1. The President of State Security may ban the person suspected of committing any of the crimes stipulated in this Law from travelling outside the Kingdom, provided that the travel ban order is referred to the Public Prosecution within 72 hours of its date of issuance, or that other measures relating to the suspect’s travel or return are taken. The ban order may provide for non-notification of the suspect of measures taken against him if security interests so require.
2. The Public Prosecutor may ban any person accused of committing any of the crimes stipulated in this Law from travelling outside of the Kingdom. The ban order may provide for non-notification of the accused of measures taken against him if the investigation so requires.

Hence, travel bans are very commonly used against human rights defenders and peaceful critics of the government. Salma al-Shehab and Nourah al-Qahtani have for instance been respectively sentenced to 27 and 45 years of travel bans on top of their prison sentences.<sup>20</sup>

Submitting organisations have also documented cases in which arbitrary travel bans are imposed, without a court order. In this case, individuals concerned find out that they cannot travel when they try to exit the country and are turned away by Saudi authorities at the border or the airport. Such travel bans therefore lack a formal legal basis and can not be appealed. This measure usually affects relatives of activists who have been sentenced.

Women’s rights defenders sentenced for their activism have all been subjected to lengthy travel bans, and some of their families have been as well. For instance, after serving her sentence, Loujain al-Hathloul was released from prison 10 February 2021 with heavy

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*travel ban*, 23 July 2020, <https://menarights.org/en/caseprofile/womens-rights-activist-loujain-al-hathloul-detained-2018> (accessed 10 August 2024).

<sup>20</sup> MENA Rights Group, *The detrimental impact of administrative counter-terrorism measures on human rights in the MENA*, 8 May 2024, <https://menarights.org/en/articles/detrimental-impact-administrative-counter-terrorism-measures-human-rights-mena>, (accessed on 21 August 2024).



restrictions, including a travel ban lasting two years and ten months. The travel ban formally ended on November 13, 2023. However, she attempted to travel in February 2024 and was told at the border that she remained under a permanent travel ban<sup>21</sup>.

Another example is the case of women human rights defender Aziza al-Youssef who was detained in May 2018 and provisionally released in March 2019. She is currently serving a five-year travel ban as part of her sentence.

Such arbitrary measures to restrict the right of movement of individuals is contrary to the Kingdom's legislation. Article 6 para. 2 of the Law on Travel Documents, states that no person may be barred from travelling except by a judicial ruling or a decision issued by the Minister of Interior or the President of State Security, for specific security-related reasons and for a specific period of time.

## 4. Treatment of women in prison

### 1. Gender discrimination in prison policies

Detained or imprisoned women are at particular risk of mistreatment and harassment by state officials in Saudi Arabia. Traditional patriarchal and conservative gender costumes are deeply embedded in institutional policies and practices and promoted through the state-sponsored media and education system. The authorities often involve male guardians in the detention or interrogation of women by demanding that they attend the interrogation or sign undertakings, implicitly holding the men accountable for the women's behaviour, and condoning domestic violence against women who may challenge their guardians' authority. Guardians are also required by the state to approve the release of women from state prisons or care institutions; putting many women at risk of having to remain in prison indefinitely if their families disown them.

Detained women human rights defenders are generally required to be released into the custody of a male relative, and male guardians are required to sign pledges to ensure the women concerned will not continue their human rights activities.

### 2. Torture and ill-treatment of women prisoners

In 2018, the authorities arrested the most prominent women's rights activists, and subjected them to enforced disappearance, torture and defamation<sup>22</sup>. Interrogators and prison guards systematically used threats of rape, acts of sexual abuse, and threats against their children and extended families. Women activists Samar Badawi, Shadan al-Onezi, Aziza al-Yousef, Eman al-Nafjan, Loujain al-Hathloul and Nouf Abdulaziz suffered various forms of systematic

<sup>21</sup> MENA Rights Group, "Saudi Arabia: NGOs renew call for lifting of the illegal travel ban on women's rights activist Loujain al-Hathloul", 13 May 2024, <https://menarights.org/en/articles/saudi-arabia-ngos-renew-call-lifting-illegal-travel-ban-womens-rights-activist-loujain-al>, (accessed on 21 May 2024).

<sup>22</sup> ALQST, *Annual Report 2018*, [https://algst.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Human-Rights-in-Saudi-Arabia-in-2018\\_En\\_Finel.pdf](https://algst.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Human-Rights-in-Saudi-Arabia-in-2018_En_Finel.pdf) (accessed on 4 September 2024).

ill-treatment and harassment including: a) arrests from homes by dozens of security forces, and subjection to house inspection under glaring spotlights with weapons being pointed at them while they held their children; b) solitary confinement for extended periods; c) one woman, at least, was photographed naked and had her photograph placed on the table during interrogation; and d) one woman, at least, was falsely informed while in detention of the death of a family member. Families of the women activists were also harassed with legal recourse. For instance, Salah al-Haidar, son of detained activist Aziza al-Yousef, was detained immediately after her provisional release for approximately two years. The parents and siblings of activist Loujain al-Hathloul who were still in Saudi Arabia were placed under an indefinite travel ban.

To date, Saudi authorities have failed to credibly investigate these acts.

Although the above-mentioned cases have gained wider attention, the authorities have continued their systematic pattern of ill-treatment and CSOs continue to document many examples of the Saudi authorities' dangerous and vindictive handling of certain prisoners whose lives they recklessly, if not deliberately, place at risk. For all of those trapped inside Saudi Arabia's harsh prison system, conditions are notoriously poor, but prisoners of conscience often also face cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment. The Saudi authorities continue to place the lives of targeted prisoners at risk through reckless negligence, wilful mistreatment, enforced disappearance and deliberate medical neglect.

For example, in September 2023, detained fitness trainer Manahel al-Otaibi had been wilfully exposed to physical and psychological abuse including beatings, bites and death threats from another inmate in Riyadh's Malaz Prison<sup>23</sup>, where she has been detained since November 2022. Since 5 November 2023, she has also been denied any family contact. While these attacks were not directly inflicted by officials, the prison authorities have made no effort to protect al-Otaibi. Their actions in fact go well beyond mere negligence because, when she notified prison officials, they prevented her from making a complaint and instead placed her in solitary confinement. On her release from solitary confinement, around 27 September 2023, she was placed in a cell shared with drug addicts, making her vulnerable to further violence.

Imprisoned women's rights activist Salma al-Shehab has also been exposed to danger by being placed alongside inmates transferred from a psychiatric hospital who experience violent episodes because of inadequate medical care. She has appealed to the official Saudi Human Rights Commission (SHRC) for these inmates to be held separately and receive adequate treatment, but so far to no avail. Moreover, the Commission has never commented on or investigated al-Shehab's case, nor has it included it in any of its reports.

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<sup>23</sup> ALQST, *The Soaring Fantasy, the Harsh Reality Human Rights in Saudi Arabia in 2023*, <https://alqst.org/uploads/the-soaring-fantasy-the-harsh-reality-human-rights-in-saudi-arabia-en.pdf> (accessed on 4 September 2024).

## 5. Reform to the law

### 1. The male guardianship system and the Personal Status Law.

Over the past few years, the Saudi authorities have lifted some of the restrictions women face under the country's male guardianship system, including allowing women to apply for their own passports and granting them more control over family matters, as well as relaxing strict gender segregation in public spaces and allowing women to drive. While these are all steps in the right direction, they are by no means enough.

The male guardianship system – a legal framework that treats adult women as minors – continues to negatively affect all aspects of women's lives and severely restrict their fundamental liberties. Reforms have been announced supposedly to protect women from abuse, but they lack adequate means of enforcement, leaving many women trapped in abusive relationships. 'Disobedience' by a woman towards her male guardian (father, husband, brother or even son) also remains a crime, effectively rendering her new freedoms null and void if her male guardian objects. While a woman may now be legally entitled to apply for her own travel document and study abroad, she can be stopped by her male guardian from leaving the country if he files a case against her for disobedience or 'absconding'.

The legal framework affecting the lives of women in Saudi Arabia also continues to be shaped by the Personal Status (or Family) Law, which was passed on 8 March 2022 and came into force on 18 June that year. Despite being touted by the authorities as a major reform, it in fact entrenches many pernicious features of the traditional male guardianship system. Previously, in the absence of a codified family law, rulings on family issues were left entirely to the discretion of judges, who often discriminated harshly against women. The new Law was eagerly awaited as a major step forward, but in fact proved to affirm and codify many features of the male guardianship system. It also contains legal loopholes that continue to allow discretionary interpretation, thus diminishing the impact of the positive changes it introduced. As a result, the male guardianship system continues to negatively affect all aspects of women's lives and to severely restrict their fundamental liberties.

For example, in relation to marriage, the PSL requires women to obtain a male guardian's permission to get married, and still allows courts to authorise the marriage of children under 18 in certain cases. Regarding divorce, men can initiate a divorce without any conditions, while women face many conditions. While the mother is automatically granted custody of any children in the event of separation, this is undermined by the fact that the father remains a child's legal guardian by default. And the codification of women's obedience to their husbands places them at further risk of domestic violence.

### 2. Discrimination in other legislations

Further discrimination in official legislations can be found in the Saudi nationality law, officially



referred to as the Saudi Arabian Citizenship System. One of the most flagrant discrimination in this law is the fact that only in extremely rare circumstances can Saudi women pass on their nationality to their children, whereas the children of Saudi men automatically acquire Saudi nationality at birth. In early 2023, the authorities announced a minor technical amendment to Article 8 of the law, transferring the authority to grant citizenship to the children of Saudi mothers and non-Saudi fathers from the Minister of Interior to the Prime Minister. However, this is subjected to almost unreachable conditions, which have still not been amended.

As for criminal conduct, Saudi Arabia does not have a written penal code at the time of e drafting of this report. However, a leaked draft of a potential new penal code has been considered by experts and civil society as a credible draft that could be promulgated by the authorities. Although it is not an implemented legislation, the draft has been criticised for not meeting international standards, including in its protection of women. The draft code effectively perpetuates gender-based violence. “Honor” crimes are the most urgent crimes that need to be tackled and prosecuted to protect women from being

killed with impunity. However, the draft code does not allow for such crimes

to be investigated and prosecuted. Another serious flaw in the draft is the non-criminalisation of marital rape.

## 6. The Saudi Human Rights Commission

Saudi Arabia established a national human rights institution (NHRI), named the Saudi Human Rights Commission (SHRC), through a decision from the Council of Ministers dated 12 September 2005.<sup>24</sup>

Submitting organisations found that the SHRC is mainly established as a tool to whitewash human rights violations in Saudi Arabia, including covering up abuses committed against women human rights defenders.<sup>25</sup>

Throughout its reporting activities, the SHRC upholds a favourable and progressive image of women’s rights advancement in Saudi Arabia. In the SHRC’s annual reports, women’s rights reforms are given a central attention. The reports extensively highlight some of the government’s achievements in enhancing women’s conditions, such as granting women the right to drive and the appointment of 100 female notaries.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Decision of the Council of Minister, 12 September 2005, available in Arabic at: <https://laws.boe.gov.sa/BoeLaws> (accessed 3 August 2024).

<sup>25</sup> ALQST, ESOHR, MENA Rights Group, *The Saudi Human Rights Commission: a whitewashing tool of the Kingdom*, [https://menarights.org/sites/default/files/2023-11/mrg\\_shrc\\_report.pdf](https://menarights.org/sites/default/files/2023-11/mrg_shrc_report.pdf), (accessed on 21 August 2024), p.16.

<sup>26</sup> Saudi Human Rights Commission, *HRC International Report*, 2021, <https://www.hrc.gov.sa/storage/reports->

However, reports from civil society and international organisations recount a different reality. While human rights NGOs have consistently called on Saudi Arabia to abolish its male guardianship system, which notably requires women to obtain male guardian permission to get married and obtain some forms of sexual and reproductive healthcare, the SHRC's seemingly women's rights-focused reports fail to acknowledge these concerns or provide any recommendations to improve women's rights in Saudi Arabia.<sup>27</sup>

In August 2018, the Canadian authorities raised concerns about the arrest of Saudi women's rights activists in a tweet.<sup>28</sup> In a response published on Twitter, the SHRC refused to accept criticism, dismissing it as "interference in the Kingdom's internal affairs", and asserted that the detainees were being treated "in accordance with the regulations in force in the Kingdom and the international agreements to which it has become a party."<sup>29</sup> This response highlights a troubling discrepancy between the Commission's rhetoric and the grim realities faced by women advocating for their rights in Saudi Arabia.

In fact, Saudi authorities particularly target women human rights defenders, which the SHRC has actively taken part in covering up. For instance, during her detention, Loujain al-Hathloul was visited by SHRC members, including Abdulrahman al-Oteibi, Samha Saeed Alghamdi, Wafa Alsaleh and Amal al-Moallami.<sup>30</sup> Al-Moallami was made fully aware of the details of the brutal acts of torture and ill-treatment al-Hathloul was subjected to, but failed to provide her with any help or assistance. Al-Moallami's deliberate silence and cover-up of Loujain al-Hathloul's torture contributed to the whitewashing of Saudi Arabia's human rights abuses. Her actions underscore the stark contrast between the SHRC's portrayal of women's rights and the harsh realities endured by women human rights defenders like Loujain al-Hathloul and Maryam al-Otaibi.

## 7. Conclusion and recommendations

Submitting organisations conclude that the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has not complied with its obligations under the CEDAW. Although the government has enacted several reforms regarding women's rights, women continue to face significant hardships and are increasingly subjected to arbitrary detention and torture.

MENA Rights Group and ALQST for Human Rights recommend give the following recommendations to the government of Saudi Arabia:

<attachment/RmC6nMJb7eDRmzayj30A1ZoOS0QC4K4oAzEUyu9.pdf> (accessed 14 August 2024), p. 9.

<sup>27</sup> ALQST, ESOHR, MENA Rights Group, *The Saudi Human Rights Commission: a whitewashing tool of the Kingdom*, [https://menarights.org/sites/default/files/2023-11/mrg\\_shrc\\_report.pdf](https://menarights.org/sites/default/files/2023-11/mrg_shrc_report.pdf), (accessed on 21 August 2024), p.14.

<sup>28</sup> Canada's Foreign Policy Twitter account (@CanadaFP), 3 August 2018, <https://twitter.com/CanadaFP/status/1025383326960549889?s=20> (accessed 10 August 2024).

<sup>29</sup> Saudi Human Rights Commission's Twitter account (@HRCSaudi), 8 August 2018, <https://twitter.com/HRCSaudi/status/1027202769458028544?s=20> (accessed 10 August 2024).

<sup>30</sup> Testimony provided by her family; Democracy for the Arab World Now, *Saudi Arabia: Samha Alghamdi Failed to Investigate Torture*, 3 December 2020, <https://dawnmena.org/samha-saeed-alghamdi/> (accessed 8 November 2023).

1. Refrain from using the Counterterrorism Law and the Anticybercrime law to arbitrarily arrest and prosecute women's rights defenders.
2. Immediately release women's rights defenders arbitrarily detained.
3. Immediately lift imposed travel bans on women's rights defenders and their families and refrain from using this tool to silence dissidents.
4. Amend the personal status law to grant women equal rights to men regarding several aspects of her personal life, such as marriage and divorce.
5. Abolish the male guardianship system and repeal any legislation that subject women to a male guardian or that does not afford sufficient protection and equal rights with men.
6. Seek accreditation of the Saudi Human Rights Commission with the Sub-Committee on Accreditation of the Global Alliance of the National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI).
7. Ensure that the Saudi Human Rights Commission effectively addresses individual cases of human rights violations and refrains from engaging in whitewashing of the government's human rights record.

MENA Rights Group is a Geneva-based legal advocacy NGO defending and promoting fundamental rights and freedoms in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. Adopting a holistic approach, we work at both the individual and structural level. We represent victims of human rights violations before international law mechanisms. In order to ensure the non-repetition of these violations, we identify patterns and root causes of violations on the ground and bring key issues to the attention of relevant stakeholders to call for legal and policy reform.

ALQST for Human Rights is an independent NGO established in 2014 by Saudi Arabian human rights defender Yahya Assiri for the purpose of defending and promoting human rights in Saudi Arabia. 'Al-qist' means 'justice' in Arabic, and a passion for justice lies at the heart of all our work. We take a consistent human rights-based approach based on international human rights law and international standards, and defend fundamental rights for all without any distinction of race, colour, sex, language, religion or national or social origin. We conduct on-the-ground research, engage in international legal and public advocacy, and campaign on behalf of victims of human rights abuses.