

ALQST for Human Rights' submission to the United Nations Human Rights Council on the 4th cycle of Saudi Arabia's Universal Periodic Review (UPR)





ALQST for Human Rights is an independent NGO founded in 2014 with 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. Through its extensive network of sources within the country, ALQST monitors and documents human rights violations on the ground and brings them to the attention of the international community through legal and public advocacy, media work, and campaigns on behalf of victims.

ALQST for Human Rights

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A. General overview and recent developments

01

Since the last UPR, the human rights situation in Saudi Arabia has continued to deteriorate. The Saudi authorities have not cooperated meaningfully with international human rights mechanisms; nor have they ratified international treaties that they agreed, in the previous UPR cycle, to ratify. They have continued to crack down brutally on peaceful acts of free expression, and the oppressive male guardianship system continues to restrict the lives of Saudi women. Prisoners of conscience have continued to face various forms of abuse.

02

The rate of executions has again spiked since a relative lull during the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite announcements to the contrary, the authorities have continued to execute people for non-violent drug and protest-related offences and offences committed as minors.

03

Large-scale state-backed development projects, such as Neom, have led to numerous and gross violations of the rights of residents, notably members of the Huwaitat tribe.

B. Acceptance of international norms and cooperation with international human rights mechanisms

04

During the last UPR cycle, Saudi Arabia accepted recommendations regarding ratification of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights¹ (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR).² To date, it has not ratified either of these, nor several other major international instruments on human rights.³

¹ Recommendations 122.3 (Mexico, France, Morocco, Latvia, Estonia, Portugal, Costa Rica, Ukraine, Romania, New Zealand)

² Recommendations 122.5 (Mexico, France, Morocco, Portugal, Costa Rica, Ukraine, New Zealand) and 122.16 (Myanmar)

³ Such as the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (ICPPED) and the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture (OPCAT)

05

Since the last UPR, Saudi Arabia has not allowed any country visits requested by UN Special Procedures mandate holders.⁴ It is also nearly two years late in submitting its state report to the Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC), and over three years late in submitting its state report to the Committee against Torture and Other Cruel Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT).⁵

06

Since the last Civil Societies' Submission to the Stakeholders' Summary, the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention (WGAD) has issued Opinions on 29 individuals.⁶ Over 90% of the individuals concerned remain detained, with others, such as Hussein Abo al-Kheir and Abbas Haiji al-Hassan, having since been executed.

07

The Saudi National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) is essentially a mouthpiece for the authorities and has ignored all of ALQST's attempts at engagement. To this date, the NHRC has failed to seek accreditation to the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions.

08

Recommendations



- Ratify the ICCPR, the ICESCR, the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (ICPPED), and the Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture (OPCAT);
- Accept all currently pending visit requests and issue a standing invitation to all UN Special Procedures mandate holders;
- Ensure the timely submission of all state reports to the UN Treaty Bodies;

⁴ United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, View Country visits of Special Procedures of the Human Rights Council since 1998, Available at: <https://spinternet.ohchr.org/ViewCountryVisits.aspx?visitType=all&country=SAU&Lang=en>

⁵ United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, UN Treaty Body Database, Available at: https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/TreatyBodyExternal/countries.aspx

⁶ United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Opinions adopted by the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, (2023), Available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures/wg-arbitrary-detention/opinions-adopted-working-group-arbitrary-detention>

- Immediately implement the recommendations made in all Opinions adopted by the WGAD;
- Make the NHRC fully independent and empower it to work according to the Paris Principles.

C. Legal framework

09

In the last UPR cycle, Saudi Arabia supported numerous recommendations on bringing its legal practices into line with international standards,⁷ yet it still lacks a formal constitution⁸ and several fundamental laws. For instance, the state supported recommendations calling for it to narrowly define its own definition of “terrorism”⁹, and to align its counter-terrorism laws with international human rights standards.¹⁰ However, the current Counter-Terrorism Law defines terrorism in unacceptably vague terms and, along with other highly problematic legislation, such as the Anti-Cybercrime Law,¹¹ continues to be used to criminalise peaceful activism and free speech. Such cases are typically tried in the Specialised Criminal Court (SCC), an exceptional jurisdiction that has increasingly been used for the prosecution of human rights and political activists

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The lack of a comprehensive penal code in Saudi Arabia continues to give state-appointed judges wide discretion to interpret the law, determine what constitutes a crime, and decide how it should be punished. A Penal Code of Discretionary Sanctions, intended to cover crimes for which there are no Sharia-specified punishments, was promised in 2021, but no progress towards this has been seen.

⁷ Recommendations 122.35 (Afghanistan), 122.175 (Italy), 122.117 (Australia), 122.142 (Netherlands), 122.246 (United Arab Emirates)

⁸ ALQST for Human Rights, *The Spotlight Fades, Repression Mounts Again: Human Rights In Saudi Arabia in 2021* (2022), p9, Available at: <https://www.alqst.org/uploads/The-Spotlight-Fades-Repression-Mounts-Again-En.pdf>

⁹ Recommendations 122.90 (Norway), 122.93 (United States of America), 122.91 (Austria)

¹⁰ Recommendations 122.90 (Norway)

¹¹ Saudi Arabia Bureau Of Experts At The Council Of Ministers, *Anti-Cyber Crime Law*, Available at: <https://laws.boe.gov.sa/BoeLaws/Laws/LawDetails/25df73d6-0f49-4dc5-b010-a9a700f2ec1d/2>

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The judiciary lacks independence, and the Public Prosecution Office reports directly to the king. Lawyers, too, operate under heavy constraints and in fear of reprisals when defending clients deemed critical of the state and its leadership. This lack of judicial independence was evident in the Riyadh Criminal Court's handling of the trial for the state-sponsored murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi. In September 2020 the court commuted death sentences for five defendants to long prison terms and jailed three other unnamed defendants, while exonerating senior officials accused of involvement and not addressing the "credible evidence" found by UN Special Rapporteur Agnès Callamard¹² and a report by the US Central Intelligence Agency¹³ against Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman.

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Recommendations

- Pass a robust and comprehensive penal code, and implement legal reforms in line with international human rights standards, including guaranteeing the independence of the judiciary;
- Amend the Counter-Terrorism Law and Anti-Cybercrime Law to bring them into line with international standards;
- Ensure that domestic legal proceedings afford all internationally recognised fair trial guarantees.

¹² United Nations Human Rights Council, Investigation of, accountability for and prevention of intentional State killings of human rights defenders, journalists and prominent dissidents, (2019), p4, Available at: <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G19/296/91/PDF/G1929691.pdf?OpenElement>

¹³ ALQST for Human Rights, Office of the Director of National Intelligence: Assessing the Saudi Government's Role in the Killing of Jamal Khashoggi, (2021), Available at: <https://alqst.org/uploads/Assessment-Saudi-Gov-Role-in-JK-Death-20210226.pdf>

D. Use of the death penalty

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Since the last UPR, the Saudi authorities have announced death penalty reforms which have not been solidified in legislative change, and in fact reverted to carrying out executions in record numbers. In 2019, 185 individuals were executed in Saudi Arabia. 2020, the year of the COVID-19 pandemic, saw a sharp fall to 27 executions, rising to 67 in 2021.¹⁴ The following year, however, Saudi Arabia executed 196 people¹⁵ of whom 81 were put to death in a single day, 12 March 2022, approximately half of them for protest-related offences. At the time of submission (18 July), Saudi Arabia has executed 72 individuals in 2023.

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During the last UPR cycle Saudi Arabia supported one recommendation calling for the state to forgo or heavily restrict the application of the death penalty.¹⁶ Saudi Arabia merely noted multiple other recommendations calling for a moratorium on, or abolition or restriction on the use of, the death penalty.¹⁷ In January 2021 the Saudi NHRC announced a limited moratorium on the death penalty for drug-related offences¹⁸, but there was no official change of policy and since November 2022, over 20 men have been executed for such crimes on the basis of *ta'zir* (at the discretion of a judge) in the continuing absence of a statutory penal code.

¹⁴ ALQST for Human Rights, *The Spotlight Fades, Repression Mounts Again: Human Rights In Saudi Arabia in 2021 (2022)*, p47, Available at: <https://www.alqst.org/uploads/The-Spotlight-Fades-Repression-Mounts-Again-En.pdf>

¹⁵ Amnesty International, *Death Penalty 2022, (2023)*, Available at: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2023/05/death-penalty-2022-executions-skyrocket/>

¹⁶ Recommendation 122.107 (Germany)

¹⁷ Recommendations 122.13 (Estonia), 122.18 (Uruguay), 122.94 (Australia), 122.95 (Brazil), 122.96, (Chile), 122.97 (Chile), 122.98 (Costa Rica), 122.99 (Cyprus), 122.100 (Czechia), 122.101 (France), 122.102 (Georgia and Italy), 122.103 (Ireland, Mexico, Sweden, Norway, Iceland), 122.104 (Slovenia), 122.105 (Spain), 122.106 (Liechtenstein), 122.108 (Argentina), 122.109 (Montenegro), 122.110 (Austria), 122.111 (New Zealand), 122.112 (Belgium), 122.113 (Argentina), 122.114 (Portugal), 122.115 (Switzerland)

¹⁸ European Parliament, *European Parliament resolution of 8 July 2021 on the death penalty in Saudi Arabia, notably the cases of Mustafa Hashem al-Darwish and Abdullah al-Howaiti (2021/2787(RSP))*, (2021), Available at: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2021-0357_EN.html

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The authorities have continued to issue the death penalty against individuals for offences they allegedly committed whilst under the age of 18, such as Abdullah al-Huwaiti¹⁹, who was re-sentenced to death on 2 March 2022, following a deeply unfair trial which relied on confessions extracted under torture, for offences allegedly committed when he was only 14. In June 2021, Mustafa Hashem al-Darwish²⁰ was executed for his peaceful participation in protests when he was aged between 17 and 19.²¹

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In October 2021, the SCC also sentenced two young Bahraini men, Jaafar Sultan and Sadiq Thamer²², to death on the basis of *ta'zir*, on terrorism and protest-related charges, following an unfair trial which relied on confessions extracted under torture. The decision was upheld by the Court of Appeal, and the two men were executed in June 2023.

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Recommendations



- Establish a moratorium on use of the death penalty with the aim of working towards its total abolition;
- Immediately repeal all death sentences against minors and those issued for non-violent offences that do not meet the international threshold of “most serious crimes”.

¹⁹ ALQST for Human Rights, Death sentence for Saudi youth destroys claims of an end to the death penalty for minors, (2022), Available at: <https://www.alqst.org/en/post/death-sentence-for-saudi-youth-destroys-claims-of-an-end-to-the-death-penalty-for-minors>

²⁰ ALQST for Human Rights, Execution of Saudi youth casts doubt on authorities' claims of reform, (2021), Available at: <https://www.alqst.org/en/post/execution-of-saudi-youth-casts-doubt-on-authorities%27-claims-of-reform>

²¹ HRC International (2020), [Twitter], Available at: https://twitter.com/HRCSaudi_EN/status/1318935445284278273

²² ALQST for Human Rights, Two young Bahrainis at imminent risk of execution in Saudi Arabia, (2022), Available at: <https://alqst.org/en/post/two-young-bahrainis-at-imminent-risk-of-execution-in-saudi-arabia>

E. Conditions of detention

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ALQST has documented several cases of avoidable deaths in detention since the last UPR, and serious concerns remain about high-profile prisoners of conscience being deliberately placed at risk. Musa al-Qarni²³ was beaten around the head and face with sharp objects while in his cell, causing serious injuries that led to his death in October 2021. The Saudi authorities failed to effectively investigate his death.

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Essa al-Nukhaifi²⁴, Fawzan al-Harbi²⁵, Mohammed al-Hudaif²⁶ and Mohammed al-Qahtani have all at various times been assigned to prison wings for dangerous inmates with mental health issues. On one occasion, al-Qahtani was attacked by a mentally ill prisoner; on another, a prisoner attempted to set fire to the wing where he was being held.

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Prisoners of conscience including Abdullah al-Hamid²⁷, Mohammed al-Qahtani and Zaheer Ali Shareeda²⁸ have also suffered deliberate medical neglect. Abdullah al-Hamid was denied treatment for his worsening health conditions, which ultimately led to his death in April 2020.^{29,30,31} Zaheer Ali Shareeda died in Al-Ha'ir Prison after contracting COVID-19 when he and others were held on the same wing as prisoners already infected with the virus.

²³ ALQST for Human Rights, Musa al-Qarni, Available at: <https://www.alqst.org/en/prisonersofconscience/musa-al-qarni>

²⁴ ALQST for Human Rights, Essa al-Nukheifi, Available at: <https://www.alqst.org/en/prisonersofconscience/essa-al-nukheifi>

²⁵ ALQST for Human Rights, Fawzan al-Harbi, Available at: <https://www.alqst.org/en/prisonersofconscience/fawzan-al-harbi>

²⁶ ALQST for Human Rights, Mohammed al-Hudaif, Available at: <https://www.alqst.org/en/prisonersofconscience/mohammed-al-hudaif>

²⁷ ALQST for Human Rights, Abdullah al-Hamid, Available at: <https://www.alqst.org/en/prisonersofconscience/abdullah-al-hamid>

²⁸ ALQST for Human Rights, Zaheer Ali Shareeda, Available at: <https://www.alqst.org/en/prisonersofconscience/Zaheer%20Ali%20Shareeda>

²⁹ ALQST for Human Rights, Leading reformer Abdullah al-Hamid moved from prison to intensive care in critical condition, (2020). Available at: <https://www.alqst.org/en/posts/416>

³⁰ ALQST for Human Rights, ALQST holds the Saudi authorities responsible for the death of human rights pioneer Dr Abdullah al-Hamid, Available at: <https://www.alqst.org/en/posts/418>

³¹ ALQST for Human Rights, Leading reformer Abdullah al-Hamid moved from prison to intensive care in critical condition, (2020). Available at: <https://www.alqst.org/en/posts/416>

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ALQST has also recently observed a trend of prisoners of conscience being held and forcibly disappeared beyond the expiry of their sentences. Examples include activists Essa al-Nukhaifi and Mohammed al-Qahtani, both of whom have been forcibly disappeared since October and November 2022 respectively³², and are currently in the process of being retried. In several instances the Saudi authorities have lengthened the jail terms of those already serving time or awaiting parole. Examples include Khaled al-Odah, Abdulaziz al-Odah and Khaled al-Omair, all jailed on charges relating to free speech.

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Recommendations



- Ensure that all Saudi prisons and places of detention adhere to the UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners;
- Fully investigate allegations of assaults on prisoners of conscience by fellow inmates, and improve methods for protecting all detainees;
- End the practices of denying prisoners of conscience contact with their families, forcibly disappearing them after they complete their sentences, and subsequently lengthening their prison terms.

F. Women's rights

23

The Saudi authorities have implemented a number of reforms pertaining to women's rights since the last UPR, including promulgating a personal status law (or family law), lifting travel restrictions and granting Saudi women the right to drive, as well as giving women the right to formally register their children's birth, and providing new safeguards aimed at tackling employment-based discrimination and sexual harassment. However, it remains a crime for a woman to "disobey" her male guardian (father, husband, brother or even son), effectively rendering null and void any new freedoms she may in theory have acquired.³³

³² ALQST for Human Rights, A New Low: Human Rights in Saudi Arabia in 2022, (2023), p17, Available at: <https://alqst.org/uploads/a-new-low-human-rights-in-saudi-arabia-en.pdf>

³³ ALQST for Human Rights, A New Low: Human Rights in Saudi Arabia in 2022, (2023), p40, Available at: <https://alqst.org/uploads/a-new-low-human-rights-in-saudi-arabia-en.pdf>

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Despite the Saudi authorities' supporting multiple recommendations in the last UPR to take measures to guarantee women's rights³⁴ and abolish the male guardianship system³⁵, this oppressive framework still remains intact. Furthermore, the new Personal Status Law, which came into effect on 18 June 2022, legalises male guardianship over women and reinforces a system of gender-based discrimination in most aspects of family life, including marriage, divorce, and making decisions about children. Furthermore, the new law does not adequately protect women from domestic violence.³⁶

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Some extraordinarily long prison sentences have been passed on women's rights activists as a result of their peaceful activities on social media. Examples include Fatima al-Shawarbi³⁷, Salma al-Shehab and Noura al-Qahtani³⁸, sentenced to 30 years and six months, 27 years and 45 years in prison respectively, for tweeting in support of Saudi women's rights defenders.

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Several women human rights defenders (WHRDs) who had been arrested in 2018, including Loujain al-Hathloul, Nouf Abdelaziz, Mayaa al-Zahrani, Samar Badawi and Nassima al-Sadah, have been conditionally released since the last UPR, but all remain subject to harsh restrictions including probationary periods and travel bans.³⁹

³⁴ Recommendations 122.240 (Portugal), 122.129 (Spain), 122.64 (Liechtenstein), 122.66 (Belgium), 122.133 (Pakistan), 122.184 (Senegal), 122.246 (United Arab Emirates), 122.138 (Brazil), 122.239 (Myanmar), 122.207 (France), 122.65 (Iceland) 122.138 (Brazil), 122.142 (Netherlands), 122.237 (Malaysia), 122.243 (Thailand), 122.200 (India), 122.201 (Belarus), 122.205 (Costa Rica), 122.233 (Algeria), 122.217 (Italy), 122.143 (Norway), 122.48 (Côte d'Ivoire), 122.63 (Morocco), 122.245 (Ukraine)

³⁵ Recommendations 122.211 (Slovenia), 122.202 (Australia), 122.207 (France), 122.205 (Costa Rica), 122.206 (Republic of Korea, Denmark, Iceland, Sweden), 122.209 (Greece), 122.210 (Haiti), 122.219 (Uruguay), 122.216 (Austria), 122.217 (Italy), 122.218 (Mexico), 122.204 (Chile), 122.208 (Germany), 122.212 (Switzerland), 122.213 (Spain), 122.214 (New Zealand), 122.215 (Norway), 122.203 (Canada)

³⁶ ALQST for Human Rights, Saudi Arabia: End male guardianship and discrimination against women, (2023), Available at: <https://www.alqst.org/en/post/saudi-arabia-end-male-guardianship-and-discrimination-against-women>

³⁷ ALQST for Human Rights, Fatima al-Shawarbi, Available at: <https://alqst.org/en/prisonersofconscience/fatima-al-shawarbi>

³⁸ ALQST for Human Rights, Fears grow for Saudi detainees awaiting trial or sentencing, following wave of 30-year-plus prison terms, (2022), Available at: <https://alqst.org/en/post/fears-grow-for-saudi-detainees-awaiting-trial-or-sentencing>

³⁹ ALQST for Human Rights, The Spotlight Fades, Repression Mounts Again: Human Rights In Saudi Arabia in 2021 (2022), p19-20, Available at: <https://www.alqst.org/uploads/The-Spotlight-Fades-Repression-Mounts-Again-En.pdf>

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In August 2022, video footage emerged of Saudi security and police officers allegedly assaulting young women in a Social Education Home (orphanage), reportedly because the women protested their poor living conditions and the various ways in which young women's rights are violated when they are kept in the home, even upon reaching adulthood.⁴⁰

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Recommendations



- Immediately abolish the male guardianship system;
- Lift all remaining restrictions on the WHRDs who have been released from prison;
- Amend the Personal Status Law to bring it into line with international standards.

G. Right to freedom of opinion and expression

29

Since the last UPR, the Saudi authorities have continued to arbitrarily arrest large numbers of people who peacefully exercise their right to freedom of opinion and expression and started jailing them for unprecedentedly long terms, usually followed by travel bans of the same length, despite having supported numerous UPR recommendations on protecting the right to freedom of expression.⁴¹

⁴⁰ ALQST for Human Rights, Video of security officers attacking women in Saudi orphanage highlights state misogyny, (2022), Available at: <https://alqst.org/ar/posts/742>

⁴¹ Recommendations 122.151 (Germany), 122.137 (Denmark), 122.148 (Czechia), 122.131 (Belgium), 122.142 (Netherlands), 122.138 (Brazil), 122.146 (Comoros), 122.152 (Nepal), 122.156 (Japan), 122.158 (Romania), 122.160 (Sweden), 122.162 (Uruguay), 122.172 (Greece), 122.132 (United States of America), 122.164 (Portugal), 122.140 (Estonia), 122.147 (Costa Rica), 122.239 (Myanmar), 122.139 (Canada), 122.153 (Ghana), 122.155 (Italy), 122.174 (Argentina)

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In April 2019, a dozen writers and activists – including Salah al-Haidar (son of women’s rights activist Aziza al-Yousef), Bader al-Ibrahim and Mohammed al-Sadiq – were jailed on charges relating to the peaceful expression of their opinions. They were released between February and March 2021 at the end of their sentences.⁴² In April 2020, journalist Aqel al-Bahili, writer Abdulaziz al-Dukhail and activist Sultan al-Ajmi were among those arrested for expressing condolences over the death of prisoner of conscience Abdullah al-Hamid.⁴³ They too were later released. Several more young activists and bloggers, arrested in May and June 2021 after peacefully expressing their opinions online, remain in pre-trial detention more than two years later, including Abdulrahman al-Sheikhi, Asma al-Subeaei, Rina Abdulaziz, Yasmine al-Ghufaili, Najwa al-Humaid, and Lina al-Sharif.⁴⁴

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In April 2021, Abdulrahman al-Sadhan, a Saudi humanitarian aid worker, was issued with a 20-year prison sentence on the basis of peaceful comments posted on his Twitter accounts.⁴⁵

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In 2022, while additional prisoners of conscience were released, they have usually continued to face harsh restrictions, including bans on travel, work and social media activity.⁴⁶ Furthermore and as means of reprisals, some of their family members have been placed on arbitrary travel bans as well.

⁴² ALQST for Human Rights, *The Spotlight Fades, Repression Mounts Again: Human Rights In Saudi Arabia in 2021 (2022)*, p23, Available at: <https://www.alqst.org/uploads/The-Spotlight-Fades-Repression-Mounts-Again-En.pdf>

⁴³ ALQST for Human Rights, *Abuses Under Scrutiny: Human Rights in Saudi Arabia (ALQST Annual Report 2020)*, (2021), p11, Available at: <https://alqst.org/uploads/Abuses-Under-Scrutiny-En.pdf>

⁴⁴ ALQST for Human Rights, *A New Low: Human Rights in Saudi Arabia in 2022*, (2023), p31, Available at: <https://alqst.org/uploads/a-new-low-human-rights-in-saudi-arabia-en.pdf>

⁴⁵ ALQST for Human Rights, *Abdulrahman al-Sadhan*, Available at: <https://www.alqst.org/en/prisonersofconscience/abdulrahman-alsadhan>

⁴⁶ ALQST for Human Rights, *A New Low: Human Rights in Saudi Arabia in 2022*, (2023), p13, Available at: <https://alqst.org/uploads/a-new-low-human-rights-in-saudi-arabia-en.pdf>

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At the same time, further arrests were made, tending to target younger and lesser known individuals such as Abdullah al-Duraibi, who was arrested and forcibly disappeared on 15 May 2022.⁴⁷ Sometimes arbitrary arrests were made of family members of people already detained, as in the case of Malik al-Dowaish.^{48,49}

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From mid-2022 onwards, Saudi courts began issuing some of the longest prison sentences ever passed on peaceful activists for peaceful expression of opinion online. In addition to cases such as the aforementioned WHRDs, Osama Khalid and Ziad al-Sufyani, two Saudi Wikipedia contributors, arrested in 2020 for their online activism, have received prison sentences of 32 and eight years, respectively.⁵⁰ Another example is Abdullah Jelani, a young Saudi activist who received a 10-year prison sentence in 2022 for peaceful online expression.

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Other prisoners of conscience have been kept in limbo for prolonged time periods as their trials are endlessly and mischievously delayed. This has been the experience of Islamic scholar Salman al-Odah since his arrest in September 2017 on charges relating to his peaceful political and religious views.⁵¹

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Recommendations



- Ensure that the right to freedom of opinion and expression is fully respected in law and practice, and immediately and unconditionally release all prisoners of conscience who are being detained for exercising their fundamental freedoms

⁴⁷ ALQST for Human Rights, A New Low: Human Rights in Saudi Arabia in 2022, (2023), p11, Available at: <https://alqst.org/uploads/a-new-low-human-rights-in-saudi-arabia-en.pdf>

⁴⁸ ALQST for Human Rights, Malek al-Dowaish, Available at: <https://www.alqst.org/en/prisonersofconscience/Malek-al-Dowaish>

⁴⁹ ALQST for Human Rights, A New Low: Human Rights in Saudi Arabia in 2022, (2023), p11, Available at: <https://alqst.org/uploads/a-new-low-human-rights-in-saudi-arabia-en.pdf>

⁵⁰ ALQST for Human Rights, Call for release of two Saudi Wikipedians (2023), Available at: <https://alqst.org/en/post/call-for-release-of-two-saudi-wikipedians>

⁵¹ ALQST for Human Rights, Abuses Under Scrutiny: Human Rights in Saudi Arabia (ALQST Annual Report 2020), (2021), p32, Available at: <https://alqst.org/uploads/Abuses-Under-Scrutiny-En.pdf>

H. Land rights

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In pressing ahead with the state-backed Neom megacity project, part of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's Vision 2030 economic development programme, the authorities have committed extensive violations of the rights of the local population in the Tabuk region of Saudi Arabia, inhabited for centuries primarily by members of the Huwaitat tribe. The Saudi authorities have uprooted Huwaiti families from their land and homes, giving them neither sufficient notice nor adequate compensation, and in many cases carrying out demolitions without warning or judicial oversight.⁵²

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At least 47 residents have been arrested for opposing forced evictions, some of them for coming to the defence of a kidnapped child; and on 13 April 2020 one protester, Abdul Rahim al-Huwaiti, was killed in his house by Special Forces. No investigation was conducted into the actions of the Special Forces. Instead, the authorities offered financial inducements to government-appointed tribal sheikhs and other notables of the Huwaitat tribe to publicly disown Abdul Rahim al-Huwaiti and denounce his resistance to eviction.

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At least 15 members of the al-Huwaitat tribe have so far been sentenced to prison terms of between 15 and 50 years under the Counter-Terrorism Law for resisting forced eviction, and at least five have been sentenced to death.

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A similar pattern of demolitions has been seen in the historic port city of Jeddah, where the Saudi authorities began to clear neighbourhoods in October 2021 as a prelude to redevelopment.⁵³ Local residents were neither given sufficient prior notice nor compensated adequately. The evictions and demolitions that have taken place have affected more than a million people.

⁵² ALQST for Human Rights, *The Dark Side of Neom: Expropriation, expulsion and prosecution of the region's inhabitants*, (2023), p17, Available at: <https://alqst.org/uploads/the-dark-side-of-neom-expropriation-expulsion-and-prosecution-en.pdf>

⁵³ ALQST for Human Rights, *The Dark Side of Neom: Expropriation, expulsion and prosecution of the region's inhabitants*, (2023), p16, Available at: <https://alqst.org/uploads/the-dark-side-of-neom-expropriation-expulsion-and-prosecution-en.pdf>

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Recommendations



- Release all members of the Huwaitat tribe who have been arbitrarily arrested for publicly criticising their eviction, and drop all charges against them;
- Ensure alternative housing and adequate compensation for all evicted and displaced persons;
- Hold timely and inclusive public consultations on all current and future development plans, to ensure that the rights, needs and interests of all stakeholders are addressed.