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*Plenary sitting*

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**B8-0260/2018**

29.5.2018

## **MOTION FOR A RESOLUTION**

with request for inclusion in the agenda for a debate on cases of breaches of human rights, democracy and the rule of law

pursuant to Rule 135 of the Rules of Procedure

on the situation on women's rights defenders in Saudi Arabia  
(2018/2712(RSP))

**Barbara Lochbihler, Ernest Urtasun, Bodil Valero, Igor Šoltes, Florent Marcellesi, Keith Taylor, Terry Reintke, Judith Sargentini, Michel Reimon, Jordi Solé, Pascal Durand**  
on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group

**B8-0260/2018**

**European Parliament resolution on the situation on women's rights defenders in Saudi Arabia  
(2018/2712(RSP))**

*The European Parliament,*

- having regard to its previous resolutions on Saudi Arabia, notably the one on Saudi Arabia, its relations with the EU and its role in the Middle East and North Africa of March 2014, the one on the case of Raif Badawi of February 2015 and the one on the case of Ali Mohammed al-Nimr of October 2015;

- having regard to the awarding of the Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought and Expression to the Saudi blogger Raif Badawi in 2015

- having regard to Saudi Arabia's membership of the UN Human Rights Council and of the Commission on the Status of Women, as well as its future membership of the Executive Council of the UN Commission on the Status of Women, starting in January 2019,

- having regard to the CEDAW Concluding observations on the combined third and fourth periodic reports of Saudi Arabia from 9th March 2018;

- having regard to the UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW),

- having regard to the International Covenant on Political and Civil Rights,

- having regard to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights,

- having regard to the European Union Guidelines on Human Rights Defenders,

- having regard to Rule 135 of its Rules of Procedure,

A. Whereas Saudi Arabia ranks among the world's most discriminatory and retrograde countries in terms of rights of women and girls, even compared to regional standards; whereas the Saudi political and social system remains profoundly undemocratic, makes women, Shia Muslims and other members of religious minorities second-class citizens, seriously discriminates against the country's large foreign workforce and severely represses all voices of dissent;

B. whereas since the 15th May 2018 Saudi authorities have arrested seven women: Loujain al-Hathloul, Aisha al- Mana, Madeha al-Ajrourh, Iman al-Nafjan, Aziza al-Youssef, Hessah al-Sheikh, Walaa al-Shubbar and, and four men: Ibrahim Fahad Al-Nafjan Ibrahim al-Modeimigh, Mohammad al-Rabae and Abdulaziz al-Meshaal, for their engagement in support of women's rights, under fabricated charges of "suspicious contact with foreign parties" and "undermining security and stability of the state"; whereas these activists are known for their

campaign against the ban on women driving and advocacy for the abolishment of the male guardianship system, and have been arrested ahead of the anticipated lifting of the ban on women driving on 24 June 2018;

C. whereas the day the lifting of the ban on women driving was announced, officials working for the king contacted prominent women's rights activists and warned them not to speak to the media;

D. whereas Loujain al-Hathloul was transferred from Abu Dhabi to Saudi Arabia against her will in March 2018 after attending a review session of Saudi Arabia at the UN CEDAW; whereas she was placed under travel ban until her recent arrest and is for now the only confirmed case currently held *incommunicado*; whereas local activists report that all detainees are held in those conditions;

E. whereas a number of reforms have been announced or introduced in recent years, including in the field of participation in municipal elections, appointment of women to the Shura Council, the opening of the labour market, improving access to government services, responding to domestic violence and allowing women to drive as of 24 June 2018;

F. whereas the announcements on societal reforms, spearheaded by Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman as part of his much-touted Vision 2030, including on women's rights, have paradoxically been accompanied by an increasing crackdown, inter alia on women human rights defenders, who are subject to arrest, threats of prosecution by the Specialised Criminal Court and other forms of intimidation; whereas achieving gender equality and ensuring women's rights requires fundamental changes and the elimination of human rights violations and discriminations in the law and in practice;

G. whereas Saudi Arabia has a range of discriminatory laws, in particular the legal provisions relating to personal status, the Civil Status Code, the Labour Code, the Nationality Act and the system of male guardianship, by which authorization from a male guardian is still expected in a number of areas, including travelling internationally, accessing health care services, choosing residency, marriage, filing complaints in the justice system, leaving state-run shelters for abused women, and for leaving detention centers;

H. whereas Saudi Arabia ranked 138 out of 144 countries in the "The Global Gender Gap Report" published by the World Economic Forum;

I. whereas tradition, religion and culture are persistently used to justify discrimination against women; whereas there is a deep-rooted use of discriminatory stereotypes in Saudi Arabia, focusing primarily on the roles of women as mothers and housewives;

J. whereas Saudi Arabia's general reservation to the CEDAW is, according to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, incompatible with the object and purpose of the Convention and impermissible under article 28 of the Convention;

K. whereas Saudi Arabia is actively engaged in imposing its own preconceptions in the UN Human Rights Council and the Commission on the Status of Women by, inter alia, pushing for reducing the scope in which certain rights apply, including LGTBI rights and freedom of opinion and expression;

L. whereas Saudi Arabia ranks 169 out of 180 on the Reporters Without Borders Press Freedom Index 2018 and is listed among the NGOs “Enemies of the Internet” list; whereas although internet is widely used and Saudi Arabia has the highest number of active Twitter users in the region, internet is heavily censored with thousands of websites being blocked and new blogs and websites needing a license from the Ministry of Information; whereas Sakharov Prize Laureate Raif Badawi is still in jail solely for peacefully expressing his views;

M. whereas the counter-terrorism law adopted in 2013 and revised in 2017 includes provisions which allow turning any dissenting expression or independent association into a crime of terrorism; whereas this law has been heavily criticised by UN experts, who have stated that they are “witnessing the persecution of human rights defenders for peacefully exercising their rights to freedom of expression, assembly, association and belief, as well as in retaliation for their work” and pointed out that “the government has ignored repeated calls by UN experts and others to halt these violations, rectify them, and prevent their recurrence”;

N. whereas Saudi Arabia Saudi Arabia is one of the five top executing countries in the world;

1. Denounces the continued, systemic discrimination against women and girls in Saudi Arabia and deplores the glaring disconnect between the encouraging announcements of reform by the Saudi leadership and the reality on the ground, as most recently illustrated by the brutal crackdown on women’s rights defenders in the past few weeks; expresses its solidarity with these admirable activists who are being repressed for seeking to redress one of the most misogynistic system worldwide;

2. Calls on the Government of Saudi Arabia to immediately and unconditionally release all these activists, as well as all the other human rights defenders and prisoners of conscience detained and sentenced for merely expressing their right to freedom of expression;

3. Deplores the fact that the EU VP/HR Frederica Mogherini has so far refrained from calling publicly for the release of the women arrested; calls on the European Union and the Member States to take a strong, public stand towards this flagrant violation of human rights, including by demanding their release in all contacts they hold with Saudi authorities; urges the EU Delegation in Riyadh to provide all appropriate support to the imprisoned women’s rights defenders, such as prison visits, trial monitoring and the provision of legal or any other form of assistance that the defendants might require;

4. Calls on the European automotive companies, allured by the commercial benefits to be accrued from the lifting of the ban on women driving and already engaged in gender-targeted advertisement such as Volkswagen, Renault, Nissan, BMW, Bugatti, Mini and Lexus, to publicly call for the release of the women’s rights activists; calls on the European automotive industry to support initiatives advocating for women’s rights in Saudi Arabia, such as #Women2Drive;

5. Calls on the EU to table a resolution on the situation of human rights defenders in Saudi Arabia at the next session of the UN Human Rights Council, which inter alia should call for the establishment of a UN Special Rapporteur on Saudi Arabia, in line with the other HRC Special Procedures created for the most serious human rights situation worldwide; calls on the EU to take an initiative at the next Human Rights Council and at the Commission on the

Status of Women which would raise the issue of membership by States with deeply questionable human rights records, notably in terms of women's rights and gender equality; deplores the vote of several EU Member States in support of Saudi Arabia's membership to the UN HRC and CSW;

6. Is deeply concerned about the prevalence of gender-based violence in Saudi Arabia, which remains largely underreported and undocumented and justified with retrograde reasons such as the need to discipline women under men's guardianship; urges Saudi authorities to adopt comprehensive legislation to specifically define and criminalise all forms of gender-based violence against women, in particular female genital mutilation, rape, including marital rape, sexual assault and sexual harassment, and to remove all obstacles women face in their access to justice; expresses profound disquiet about the reports of a prevailing practice of child marriage; is deeply concerned about the situation of migrant female workers, who face an absolute lack of protection from Saudi authorities and are faced with continuous situations of violence and harassment, condemns in this regard the recent execution of Muhammad Zaini;

7. Calls on the Saudi authorities to revise the Law on Associations and Foundations of December 2015 in order to allow women activists to organise themselves and to work freely and independently without undue interference by the authorities; urges as well the revision of the Anti-Terrorist law, the Anti-Cybercrime Law and the Press and Publications Law, which are repeatedly used to prosecute human rights defenders, as well as of all discriminatory provisions present in the legal system including in fields such as inheritance, transmission of nationality and marriage;

8. Is dismayed by the existence of the male guardianship system, which is a reflection of the deeply rooted patriarchal system that prevails in the country, and urges Saudi authorities to abolish it without any delay;

9. Calls on the Saudi authorities to ratify the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to lift the reservations made to CEDAW and to ratify the Optional Protocol to the CEDAW in order to ensure that Saudi women can fully enjoy the rights enshrined in the Convention; urges Saudi to extend a standing invitation to the visit of all Special Procedures of the UN Human Rights Council;

10. Calls on the Saudi authorities to introduce an immediate moratorium on the use of the death penalty as a step towards abolition; calls for a review of all death sentences to ensure that these trials adhered to international standards;

11. Calls on the European Union to include a discussion on human rights, particularly the situation of women's human rights defenders, as a permanent item on the agenda of the annual summit between the EU and the Gulf Cooperation Council;

12. Calls on the EEAS and the Commission to support in an active manner civil society groups and individuals defending human rights in Saudi Arabia, including through arranging prison visits, trial monitoring and public statements; calls on the EEAS to consider proposing the adoption of EU restricted measures related to serious human rights violations (including asset freeze and visa bans), as are currently in place against individuals in a number of countries such as Iran, Myanmar and Ukraine;

13. Calls on the European Court of Auditors to carry out an audit of the Chaillot Prize for the Promotion of Human Rights in the Gulf Cooperation Council Region, organized annually by the EU delegation to Riyadh; expresses consternation at the award rules, which restrict applications to those who are legally registered and active in a “constructive engagement with the authorities”; urges the EU delegation to Saudi Arabia to refrain from using EU money to legitimize laws such as the Law on Associations and Foundations which in practice do not allow the registration of civil society organisations and severely impede the activity of human rights defenders;

14. Calls, once again, on the Saudi authorities to put a stop to any further flogging of Raif Badawi and to release him immediately and unconditionally; insists that all senior representatives of the EU, notably VPHR Mogherini and Commissioners, systematically raise the case of Raif Badawi in their contacts with their Saudi counterparts and to request to meet with him during their visits in the country; commits to stepping up its efforts in support of his release; decides to send its President to Riyadh in order to raise the case of the Sakharov Prize laureates directly with the authorities;

15. Deplores the significant arms deals by EU Member States, among others Spain, France, Germany and the United Kingdom, with Saudi Arabia, which run counter to the EU Common Position on Arms exports; calls, once again, for an EU-wide ban on export, sale, update and maintenance of any form of security equipment to Saudi Arabia which can be or is used for internal repression, including Internet surveillance technology; calls on the High Representative to report on the current state of military and security cooperation by EU Member States with the Saudi regime;

16. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the European Commission, the European External Action Service, the UN Secretary General, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Commission on the Status of Women, the Human Rights Council, H.M. King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud and the Crown Prince Mohammad Bin Salman Al Saud, the Government of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and the Secretary-General of the Centre for National Dialogue of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.