



Plenary sitting

B8-0268/2018

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 of women's rights defenders in Saudi Arabia
(2018/2712(RSP))

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on behalf of the ALDE Group

B8-0268/2018

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

The European Parliament,

- having regard to its previous resolutions on Saudi Arabia in particular 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, the one on the case of Ali Mohammed al-Nimr of October 2015, and the ones adopted in November 2017 and February 2016, which call for an EU-wide arms embargo against Saudi Arabia given the serious allegations of Saudi Arabia breaching international humanitarian law in Yemen;
- having regard to the UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW),
- having regard to Saudi Arabia's membership of the UN Human Rights Council,
- having regard to the UN Human Rights Committee, in its General Comment No. 27 on the right to freedom of movement (1999); to the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, General Recommendation No.24, the Right to Health (1999),
- having regard to the International Labour Organisation (ILO) No.111 concerning Discrimination in Respect to Employment and Occupation (June 15 1960),
- having regard to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)
- having regard to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) in 1948,
- having regard to the 69th Session – Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, Joint submission on Saudi Arabia on behalf of ALQST, GCHR and International Federation for Human Rights Leagues (FIDHR) on 7 March 2018,
- having regard to the Gulf Center for Human Rights (GCHR) press release on the detention of Saudi Women's rights defenders on 21 May 2018,
- having regard to the Human Rights Watch press release on Saudi Arabian Women's Rights Advocates Arrested and the Amnesty International press release on Saudi Arabia's 'extremely worrying development' towards women's rights both on 18 May 2018,
- having regard to Rule 135 of its Rules of Procedure,

- A. whereas Saudi Arabia has some of the world's tightest restrictions imposed on women, despite recent government reforms aimed at boosting women's rights in the employment sector; whereas in spite of the introduction of some cautious reforms, the Saudi legal, political and social system remains profoundly undemocratic, makes women second-class citizens, seriously discriminates against the country's large foreign workforce and severely represses all voices of dissent;
- B. whereas since 15 May 2018, Saudi authorities have arrested at least 12 women's rights defenders, including leaders and supporters of the #Right2Drive and #IAmMyOwnGuardian campaigns, just weeks before the kingdom's longstanding driving ban on women is set to be lifted; whereas the arrested defenders have since been named as threats to national security; whereas four of the recently arrested human rights defenders have reportedly been released, and others remain in detention and may face extended jail sentences;
- C. whereas detainees include Loujain al-Hathloul, Aisha al Manea and Eman al Nafjan, who are all known as prominent and respected voices against the driving ban as well as the kingdom's enduring guardianship laws;
- D. whereas according to testimonies the royal court had ordered them to remain silent in September 2017 when the decision to lift the long-standing driving ban on women as of 24 June 2018 was announced via royal decree;
- E. whereas on 23 May 2018 a statement issued by the Presidency of the State Security cited possible charges for "suspicious contact with foreign parties" and undermining the "security and stability" of the kingdom;
- F. whereas on 25 May 2018 Saudi authorities arrested prominent human rights defender Mohammed al-Bajadi, a founding member of the banned Saudi Civil and Political Rights Association, which has accused security forces of abuses;
- G. whereas within days of the defenders' arrests, government-aligned media outlets and social media platforms launched a vicious smear campaign against these defenders denouncing them as "traitors" as well as posing a threat to state security; whereas experts believe the smear campaign currently being waged against the defenders' indicate the intention to issue potentially very harsh punishments;
- H. whereas the case of Loujain al-Hathloul is particularly alarming, as she 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 currently the only defender held in *incommunicado* as of 20 May 2018;
- I. whereas Saudi defenders based outside the country, including in Western capitals, have gone silent in recent weeks due to threats to their families in Saudi Arabia;
- J. whereas Saudi Arabia's guardianship system requires women to obtain permission from their fathers, brothers, husbands or even sons for a multitude of life decisions; whereas

human rights defenders state that social change will not happen without the dismantling of the current system;

- K. whereas in recent months Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman has overseen a widespread crackdown on prominent defenders, lawyers, and human rights defenders, which has intensified since he began consolidating control over the country's security institutions;
 - L. whereas the Saudi regime is at the same time running an expensive international media campaign portraying itself as a modernising force, announcing reforms with advertisements in newspapers and on billboards in Western capitals; whereas Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman travelled to the United States for a “cross-country America tour”, meeting the President and many leaders in the tech and entertainment industry, including celebrities;
 - M. whereas Saudi Arabia has a lively community of online defenders and the highest number of Twitter users in the Middle East; whereas Saudi Arabia is on the Reporters Without Borders list of “Enemies of the Internet” due to the censorship of the Saudi media and the Internet and punishment of those who criticize the government or religion; whereas freedom of expression and freedom of the press and media, both online and offline, are crucial preconditions and catalysts for democratization and reform and are essential checks on power; whereas 2015 Sakharov Prize Laureate Raif Badawi is still in jail solely for peacefully expressing his views;
1. Expresses utmost concern over the situation of women’s rights defenders and the recent arrests in Saudi Arabia ahead of the lift of the longstanding driving ban on women; explicitly condemns the arrests and charges brought against them;
 2. Calls for the immediate and unconditional release of all women’s rights defenders as well as all human rights defenders, including Mohammed al-Bajadi, detained solely for their peaceful human rights work.
 3. Urges the Saudi authorities to immediately disclose the current location of Loujain al-Hathloul and allow her to make contact with her family.
 4. Stresses that all detainees’ physical and mental health has to be respected for as long as they remain under detention, and stresses that all detained human rights defenders must have immediate and unfettered access to their lawyers and families;
 5. Condemns the Saudi authorities’ endless harassment on human rights defenders, both inside and outside the country, and in particular against those defending women’s rights issues in the country; condemns the recent smear campaign against the women’s rights defenders and insists that the Saudi authorities take the necessary steps to allow women to exercise their rights freely without any judicial harassment or any other reprisals, such as threats to their families;

6. Calls on the Saudi authorities to allow independent press and media and ensure freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly for all inhabitants of Saudi Arabia; condemns the repression of defenders and protesters when they demonstrate peacefully; stresses that the peaceful advocacy of basic legal rights or making critical remarks using social media are expressions of an indispensable right; urges the Saudi authorities to remove restrictions placed on defenders which prohibit them from speaking out on social media and to international media;
7. Condemns all kinds of discrimination against women including restrictions on freedom of movement and reminds the Saudi authorities of their international obligations under the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), as well as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.
8. Calls on Saudi Arabia to accelerate the reforms and reiterates the necessity for Saudi Arabia to fully respect human rights and human dignity, especially concerning women and the imposition of male legal guardianship, which strictly violates article 15 of CEDAW; calls on the male²s guardianship system to be revoked.
9. Reminds Saudi Arabia of its additional obligations as a member of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and as party to ILO Convention No.111 dealing with discrimination in employment.
10. Reminds the Saudi Arabia leadership of its pledge to "uphold the highest standards in the promotion and protection of human rights" when it applied successfully for membership to the UN Human Rights Council in 2013.
11. Calls on the Saudi authorities to put a stop to any further flogging of Raif Badawi, release him immediately and unconditionally as he is considered a prisoner of conscience, detained and sentenced solely for exercising his right to freedom of expression; Calls on EU authorities to raise his issue in any high level contact that there may be.
12. Calls on the HR/VP, EEAS and Member States to ensure full implementation of the EU Guidelines on Human Rights Defenders and expand their protection and support for human rights defenders, particularly women's rights defenders;
13. Urges the HR/VP, EEAS and Member States to conduct a dialogue with Saudi Arabia on human rights, fundamental freedoms and the troubling role of the country in the region;
14. 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, 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.

