

48th session of the UN Human Rights Council

Item 3: Interactive Dialogue with the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention

September 20, 2021

Madam President,

Right Livelihood, ALQST, International Service for Human Rights and MENA Rights Group thank the Working Group for highlighting in the report that human rights defenders remain particularly vulnerable to arbitrary deprivation of liberty.

We remain deeply concerned at the systematic practice of arbitrary detention of human rights defenders and peaceful dissidents in Saudi Arabia, who are subjected to persecution and prosecution only for exercising their fundamental rights and advocating for the dignity, equality and freedom of others.

Hundreds of individuals are serving lengthy prison sentences on the basis of the counter-terrorism and anti-cybercrime law, which are systematically used to target any peaceful dissenting voices in the Kingdom.

Among those who paid a high price for daring to promote democratic reforms are Right Livelihood Laureates **Mohammed al-Qahtani** and **Waleed abu al-Khair**, who are serving respectively 10 and 15 years in prison on activism-related charges.

Despite the Working Group's [findings](#) that their deprivation of liberty is arbitrary and its repeated calls for their release, they are still languishing in prison, in extremely poor conditions, subjected to ill-treatment, and medical and administrative neglect.

Madam President,

In 2021, with the spotlight of the G20 presidency fading, the authorities resumed their crackdown on free expression, handing heavy prison sentences to dozens of peaceful activists.

We urge the Working Group to renew their request for a country visit as a matter of urgency and we reiterate our calls on the Council to urge Saudi Arabia:

- To promptly reform the laws on cybercrime and counter-terrorism to guarantee the right to freedom of expression and association to align with Saudi Arabia's international human rights obligations;
- To release all human rights defenders arbitrarily detained and provide them with compensation and rehabilitation for the harm suffered.