

القسط
ALQST
For Human Rights لحقوق الإنسان

A New Low:
Human Rights in Saudi Arabia in 2022

ALQST Annual Report

February 2023



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For Human Rights لحقوق الإنسان

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1. Introduction

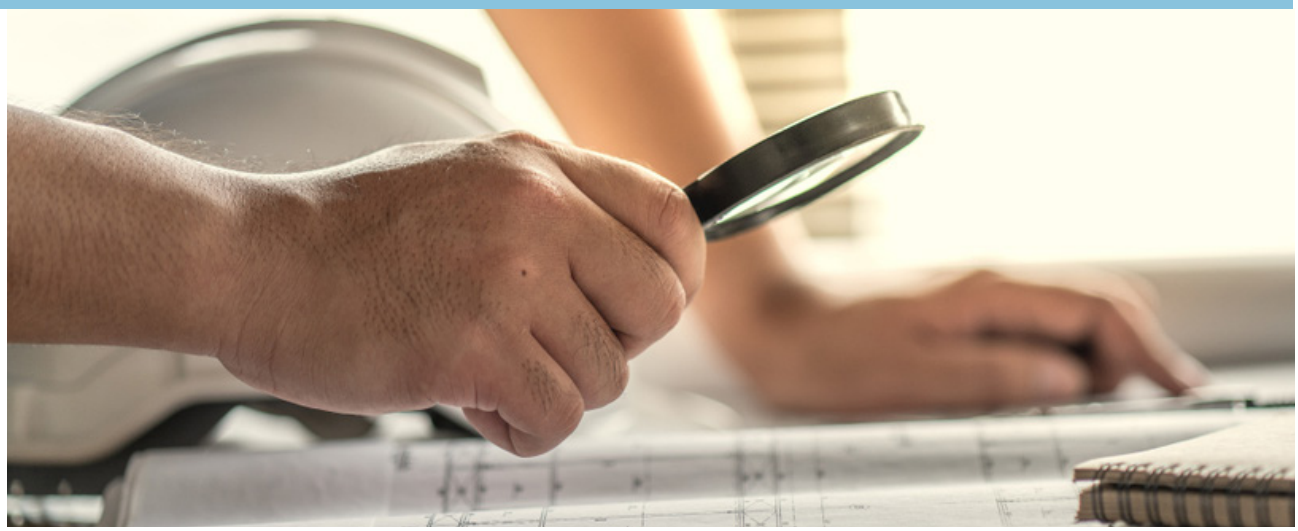
The Saudi authorities' repression and contempt for human rights reached a new low in 2022. The familiar pattern of arbitrary arrests and enforced disappearances continued and, from mid-year onwards in particular, the Saudi courts started imposing jail sentences of unprecedented severity for peaceful, legitimate activity on social media, further deepening the climate of fear in the kingdom. Use of the death penalty increased sharply after a lull during the COVID period, with the biggest mass execution in recent times (of 81 men in a single day), and executions for non-violent drugs-related offences made a dramatic comeback.

This intensification of the authorities' repression went hand in hand with the progressive diplomatic rehabilitation of Saudi Arabia's crown prince and de facto ruler, Mohammed bin Salman. He had been cold-shouldered by the international community since 2018 because of his directing role in the state-sponsored assassination of journalist Jamal Khashoggi.

This position had already begun to soften in 2021, as US President Joe Biden's promise to "recalibrate" US-Saudi relations failed to materialise. But then in 2022 the energy crisis caused by Russia's war in Ukraine led Western and other leaders to abandon any remaining scruples, and reach out to Riyadh for increased oil supplies. Visits to Saudi Arabia, including meetings with Bin Salman, by the UK's then-Prime Minister, Boris Johnson in March and President Biden in July, followed by a meeting in Paris between the crown prince and French President Emmanuel Macron, sealed Mohammed bin Salman's successful return, with impunity, to the international stage. This in turn, it seems, unleashed a new wave of intense repression in the Saudi kingdom, as ALQST and other activists and human rights organisations had previously warned.

In the light of these developments, and in the current challenging global situation, it is now more important than ever for the international community – politicians, business leaders, celebrities in the world of sport and entertainment and the general public – to take principled action wherever they can to champion human rights, and to resist the Saudi leadership's efforts to whitewash their deplorable record.

2. Executive Summary



In the course of 2022, three significant pieces of **new legislation** were introduced in Saudi Arabia. One was the kingdom's first codified **Personal Status (or Family) Law**, which came into force on 18 June but reinforced aspects of the male guardianship system rather than dismantling it. Meanwhile, no progress was announced on a promised Penal Code of Discretionary Sanctions, intended to cover crimes for which there are no Sharia-specified punishments. There remains a **legal vacuum** in Saudi Arabia due to the absence of a formal constitution and several fundamental laws, and all of the authorities' reforms are further undermined by unrelenting repression, lack of respect for basic rights, and the judiciary's lack of independence.

The Saudi authorities continued in 2022 to **arbitrarily arrest people** who peacefully exercised their right to freedom of expression and other fundamental rights. With many prominent figures already behind bars, the year's arrests again tended to target younger and lesser known individuals, and some family members of people already detained. In addition, news continued to emerge of individuals who had been arrested in previous years. Meanwhile, four detained **Uyghur Muslims**, including a 13-year-old girl, were told they were about to be deported to China, though it seems they are still in detention in Saudi Arabia.

Dozens of prisoners of conscience were released in 2022 after completion of their prison sentences, but even then only on strict conditions that usually included **arbitrary bans on travel**, work and social media activity. In a worsening trend, many prisoners of conscience continued to be arbitrarily **detained long after expiry of their prison sentences** and were instead forcibly disappeared or even resentenced to further terms.

In 2022 we again saw the Saudi authorities place the lives of targeted prisoners at risk through reckless negligence, wilful mistreatment, enforced disappearance and deliberate medical neglect. ALQST is particularly concerned for the well-being of prisoners of conscience Mohammed al-Qahtani and Essa al-Nukheifi, who were due for release on completion of their sentences in late 2022 but remain forcibly disappeared somewhere within the prison system. Al-Nukhaifi and other detained activists have also staged hunger strikes in protest against abusive treatment.

During the year, and especially from mid-2022 onwards, the Saudi courts handed down some of the most draconian sentences ever passed on peaceful activists (or anyone else) in the kingdom, marking a new low for human rights in the country and signalling a new phase of repression. On 9 August, for example, Salma al-Shehab was sentenced to 34 years in jail, to be followed by a 34-year travel ban, for tweeting about women's rights and expressing support for prisoners of conscience. Three members of the Huwaitat tribe, who had peacefully resisted eviction for construction of the Neom megacity project, were sentenced to execution; others received jail sentences of up to 50 years.

Some of those convicted had their sentences dramatically lengthened on appeal. As well as cases where the penalty was increased before the appeals process was exhausted and the sentence made final (and this was a notable trend in 2022), there were others where the Saudi authorities actually increased the sentences – and thus extended the detention – of those already nearing the end of their prison terms.

The Saudi state executed 148 individuals during 2022, more than twice as many as in 2021, including the execution of 81 men, 41 of them from the Shia community, in a single day. Executions for drugs-related offences made a dramatic comeback, despite the previous announcement of a moratorium on use of the death penalty for such non-violent crimes. Meanwhile, further death sentences have been issued for crimes allegedly committed by minors, destroying the authorities' claim to have discontinued use of the death penalty for juveniles.

The Saudi authorities continued to unlawfully expropriate land earmarked for state development projects, demolish properties, and forcibly evict residents, most notably in Jeddah. A survey conducted by ALQST revealed the devastating impact of these actions, carried out without public consultation and often without notification or compensation. The authorities also waged an extraordinary campaign of prosecutions against members of the Huwaitat tribe who had protested against such treatment earlier.

On 8 March 2022, Saudi Arabia passed its first Personal Status (or Family) Law. 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, however, serves to codify rather than abolish many features of the oppressive male guardianship system, so

that women continue to be subjected to male control. In August, an assault by police and security officers on young women in an orphanage in Khamis Mushait, Asir Province, raised fresh questions about conditions and the quality of care for children, especially girls and young women, in the Saudi social care system.

In Saudi Arabia, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people continue to face discrimination and stigmatisation, and risk imprisonment or even execution for expressing their sexual orientation or gender identity. The lack of LGBT rights in Saudi Arabia has been commented on several times by global celebrities invited to the kingdom.

The large number of stateless persons in Saudi Arabia, known as "Bidoon" (meaning in Arabic "without", i.e. without nationality), continued to struggle and suffer hardship in every aspect of their lives, including education, health, work and family life.

Migrant workers, and domestic workers in particular, continued to suffer routine abuse under the kingdom's notorious *kafala* (sponsorship) system.

Despite a welcome UN-brokered truce that lasted from April until October, the warring parties in Yemen continued to commit grave violations, and the ongoing humanitarian crisis there remains one of the worst in the world. Meanwhile, Western governments continued to supply the Saudi-led coalition with military assistance and equipment, and in August 2022 the Biden administration approved a $3.05 billion sale of 300 US-made surface-to-air missiles to Saudi Arabia.

On the international stage, 2022 saw the dangerous rehabilitation of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, who was granted meetings with a number of global leaders, including US President Joe Biden, as priorities shifted in light of Russia's war in Ukraine and a spike in energy prices. These developments made efforts to secure accountability more pressing than ever. Meanwhile, the Saudi authorities carried over into 2022 their previous intensive PR strategy of investing heavily in international sporting and music events, prompting calls for participating celebrities to speak out in support of human rights in the kingdom.

ALQST's Annual Report concludes with a list of recommendations both for the Saudi authorities and for the international community, and a timeline of human rights-related events in Saudi Arabia in 2022.

3. Legal Framework



In the course of 2022, three significant pieces of new legislation were introduced in Saudi Arabia. The kingdom's first codified Personal Status (or Family) Law was finally passed in March 2022 and came into force on 18 June (see section 10, Women's Rights, page 40). The Civil Transactions Law, intended to regulate private law relationships in the absence of a civil code, was approved in May 2022, and the Law of Evidence came into force in July aiming to "eliminate discrepancies in courts". Meanwhile, a Penal Code of Discretionary Sanctions, set to be the country's first written penal code to cover crimes for which there are no Sharia-specified punishments, was also due to come into force but has yet to be passed. In the summer, what purported to be a draft copy of the code appeared online, but the Ministry of Media denied its authenticity and no further progress has been announced.

All four new laws had been promised back in February 2021, when Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman announced that by the end of that year Saudi Arabia would adopt new laws and revise existing ones to "reform the kingdom's judicial institutions". Apart from the fact that the Penal Code of Discretionary Sanctions has not yet emerged, and that the Personal Status Law is deeply disappointing in terms of women's rights, all of the authorities' reforms are heavily undermined by their unrelenting repression, lack of respect for basic rights, and the judiciary's lack of independence.

The absence of fundamental laws creates a legal vacuum

The Saudi authorities claim that jurisdiction in the kingdom is based on Sharia (Islamic law) as interpreted by the Council of Senior Scholars, the kingdom's highest religious authority. The country has no formal constitution, only a Basic Law of Governance that fails to embody fundamental rights and freedoms. Moreover, the kingdom does not have a criminal code but instead leaves legal interpretation to the discretion of judges. This means that the legal definition of crimes, as well as the determination and severity of their punishments, rests

on the judges' discretionary interpretation, thus giving them enormous leeway to construe acts retroactively as crimes. The Penal Code of Discretionary Sanctions, when eventually introduced, should be designed to address this major problem.

The absence of a criminal code undermines clarity and legal certainty and violates Article 11 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states that "[n]o one shall be held guilty of any act or omission which did not constitute a penal offence, under national or international law, at the time when it was committed". Meanwhile, the legal vacuum in Saudi Arabia is being filled with pieces of exceptional legislation, such as those discussed below, which can be interpreted to include a wide spectrum of offences.

The Law on Combating Crimes of Terrorism and its Financing

On 1 November 2017 the Law on Combating Crimes of Terrorism and its Financing (the Counter-Terrorism Law) came into force, replacing the already repressive 2014 Counter-Terrorism Law. The updated law defines terrorism in vague terms and does not require the use of violence in order for an act to be characterised as terrorist; in fact it categorises a wide array of non-violent acts as terrorist, including "disturbing public order", "undermining public security" and "destabilising the state or endangering its national unity". It also stipulates a punishment of five to 10 years in prison for anyone who "directly or indirectly" portrays the King or the Crown Prince "in a manner that brings religion or justice into disrepute". The law is routinely used to criminalise acts that fall under the rights to freedom of opinion, expression, peaceful assembly and association.

Moreover, the revised Counter-Terrorism Law fails to uphold due process guarantees. Articles 19 and 20 give the Public Prosecution authority to hold suspects in incommunicado detention for up to 90 days "if the investigation so warrants", while the Specialised Criminal Court can extend the period of custody – including incommunicado detention – indefinitely. This constitutes a serious violation of due process, as it denies suspects not only contact with their families but also access to legal counsel. It places individuals outside the protection of the law and facilitates the practice of torture and ill-treatment, while prolonged incommunicado detention can constitute a form of torture in itself. Hence individuals accused under the Counter-Terrorism Law are extremely vulnerable to torture.

The Anti-Cybercrime Law

While free expression has historically been repressed and analogue publications restricted by the 2000 Law of Printing and Publication, updated in 2003, the 2007 Anti-Cybercrime Law built a new framework to suppress free speech online. The vague provisions of the law are frequently used to charge and try individuals for expressing their opinions in online publications or on social media.

Article 6 of the Anti-Cybercrime Law criminalises "the production, preparation, transmission or storage of material that harms public order, religious values, public morals and privacy via an information network" with up to five years in prison and fines of up to three million Saudi riyals (US$800,000).

The Law on Associations and Foundations

Approved in December 2015, the Law on Associations and Foundations officially came into force in March 2016. Before that date no legislation had existed to permit or regulate the establishment of civil society organisations, although the Saudi authorities had historically allowed the operation of charitable associations under tight government control.

The Law on Associations and Foundations severely restricts the formation of fully independent civil society organisations. It lays down vaguely worded grounds for denying registration to civil society organisations, including "violating Islamic Sharia", "acting contrary to public morals" and "breaching national unity". While it explicitly refers to educational and charitable activities, the law does not permit the establishment of human rights organisations.

The law also prohibits foreign foundations and associations from establishing branches inside Saudi Arabia, and subjects domestic civil society organisations to extensive government interference in their internal affairs.

International legal obligations

On top of its national legal framework, Saudi Arabia has further committed to a number of international human rights instruments. Over the past three decades Saudi Arabia has acceded to the International Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT); the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW); the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD); and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD); as well as the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and two of its optional protocols.

Accordingly, the Saudi authorities have pledged to uphold the standards of these conventions and to integrate their provisions and legal safeguards into national legislation. Saudi Arabia is periodically reviewed by the respective committees of these conventions, who are tasked with monitoring states' implementation. Again and again these UN committees have reprimanded Saudi Arabia for its substantial lack of implementation and failure to meet its obligations as set out in the conventions.

4. Arbitrary Arrests



The Saudi authorities continued in 2022 to arbitrarily arrest people who peacefully exercised their right to freedom of expression and other fundamental rights. With many prominent figures already behind bars, the year's arrests again tended to target younger and lesser known individuals such as **Abdullah al-Duraibi**, who was arrested and forcibly disappeared on 15 May 2022. On 14 May, officials from the Saudi Presidency of State Security raided al-Duraibi's home and confiscated his devices before summoning him for questioning the following day. He has not been heard from since.

Sometimes arrests were made of family members of people already detained. In July 2022, the Saudi authorities arrested **Malik al-Dowaish**, son of the preacher Sulaiman al-Dowaish who has been forcibly disappeared since 2016. His two brothers Abdulwahhab and Abdulrahman were both arrested in 2021 in reprisal for their relationship with and advocacy for their father (see page 23). Nothing was heard of Malik for several weeks, until his release in early September. Less than a month after his release Malik was re-arrested, and there has been no information about him since.

News also continued to emerge in 2022 of individuals who had been arrested in previous years. ALQST learned that activist **Najwa al-Humaid** was arrested on 16 May 2021, during a wave of arrests of young activists and bloggers, over peaceful tweets in support of human rights. She had been summoned for interrogation several times before her latest arrest, on one occasion being detained for two weeks. During the year ALQST also learned that the Saudi authorities had arrested engineer **Mahmoud Abdul Baqi** in November 2021, and Saudi Telecommunication Company (STC) employee **Othman Abdulaziz** in January 2022, arrests which appear to be linked to the peaceful expression of their opinions. In addition, news emerged of many individuals arrested in recent years who have since been handed harsh prison sentences, including **Salma al-Shehab**, **Nourah Saeed al-Qahtani**, **Osama Khaled**,

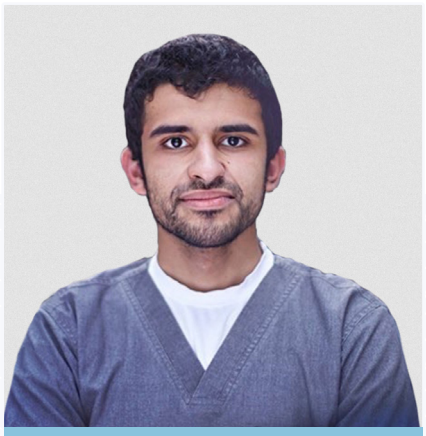
Saad Ibrahim al-Madhi, and Abdullah Jelan (see section 7, Unfair Trials and Harsh Sentences, page 25).

Some of those arrested subsequently face the risk of deportation. In January 2022, a Saudi official informed two Uyghur Muslims, Hemdullah Abduweli and Nurmemet Rozi, that they were at imminent risk of being forcibly deported to China, where they faced the risk of torture or enforced disappearance. The two men had been detained in November 2020 while on pilgrimage in Saudi Arabia; over two years later, still no explanation for their arrest has been given. In the mean time, on 31 March 2022 the former wife of Nurmemet, Buheliqiemu Abula, and her 13-year-old daughter were also detained and told that they would be deported. It seems the deportations have still not been carried out and that the individuals remain in detention in Saudi Arabia.

Meanwhile, those who are forced to flee Saudi Arabia and seek asylum abroad often face the risk of being deported back to the country. One such example is Saudi activist Abdulrahman al-Khalidi, who was forced to leave Saudi Arabia in 2013 due to his peaceful online activity. After eight years of exile in Turkey, al-Khalidi left the country and applied for asylum in Bulgaria on 23 October 2021; he was arrested two days later. His asylum application was then rejected, based on the flawed assessment that Saudi Arabia has taken "measures to democratise society"; an appeal is currently pending but he remains at risk of deportation to the kingdom, where he would potentially face threats to his well-being and safety.



Salma al-Shehab



Osama Khaled



Abdullah Jelan

5. Prisoners and Detainees Released Under Continuing Restrictions or Held Beyond Expiry of Sentences



2022 saw dozens of prisoners of conscience released after completion of their prison sentences, but even then only on strict conditions that usually included arbitrary bans on travel, work and social media activity. Their number added to the list of individuals conditionally released in previous years who continue to face harsh restrictions. In a worsening trend, many prisoners of conscience continued to be arbitrarily detained long after their sentences had expired. Some were eventually released, while others continued to be held in detention or even faced resentencing to further terms. [Note: Prison terms in Saudi Arabia are based on the Islamic Hijri calendar, in which a year is approximately 11 days shorter than in the Gregorian calendar.]

Prisoners released after serving unjust prison sentences

On 11 March 2022, Saudi blogger **Raif Badawi** was released several days after the expiry of his 10-year sentence, imposed for his writings. He had been detained since June 2012 and remains under a 10-year travel ban. In April, writer **Mohammed al-Khowaildi** was released after almost six years in prison following his arrest on 23 June 2016. He too remains under a travel ban. On 23 July, the Saudi authorities released human rights activist and writer **Nadhir al-Majed**, who had been detained since January 2017 and served a seven-year sentence. Al-Majed is now under a seven-year travel ban. And on 25 December, journalist and writer **Khaled al-Alkami** was released after completing his prison term. He was arrested on 12 September 2017. All of these individuals were jailed for peacefully exercising their right to free expression.

Even more recently, on 7 January 2023, human rights defender and member of the Saudi Civil and Political Rights Association (ACPRA) **Abdulkarim al-Khodr**, detained in April 2013 and sentenced to ten years in prison for his peaceful human rights work, was released following the expiry of his sentence. He remains under a ten-year travel ban. Fellow ACPRA member **Abdulrahman al-Hamid**, detained in 2014 and sentenced to nine years in prison for his peaceful activism, was released on 9 January following the expiry of his sentence. He remains subject to a nine-year travel ban.



Raif Badawi



Nadhir al-Majed



Abdulkarim al-Khodr

ACPRA

The Saudi Civil and Political Rights Association (ACPRA) was established in October 2009 with the aim of promoting and safeguarding the fundamental human, civil and political rights of all Saudi citizens. It peacefully advocated for a constitutional monarchy, a universally elected parliament, an independent judiciary and the protection of fair trial rights in Saudi Arabia. ACPRA also documented human rights violations within the kingdom, helped victims to file legal claims against the officials responsible, and shared the information with foreign NGOs and the relevant UN Special Procedures.

ACPRA was never legally recognised by the government, yet was only formally banned in 2013. All of its 11 members were prosecuted and severely punished by the Saudi authorities for their human rights activism and cooperation with United Nations human rights mechanisms.

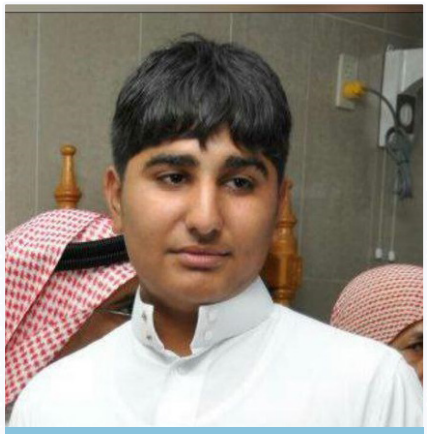
On 2 February 2022 **Dawoud al-Marhoun**, detained since 2012 for taking part in protests when he was a minor, was released following the expiry of his sentence. Al-Marhoun had previously faced the death penalty until his sentence was commuted in 2021 to a 10-year jail term. This also happened in the cases of **Ali al-Nimr** and **Abdullah al-Zaher**, who were both released in late 2021. All three of them were convicted for actions in peaceful exercise of the right to free assembly, and remain under 10-year travel bans.



Dawoud al-Marhoun



Ali al-Nimr



Abdullah al-Zaher

On 11 February **Naima al-Matrood**, detained since April 2016, also for allegedly participating in protests, was released following the expiry of her six-year sentence, but remains under a six-year travel ban. And on 24 June **Murtaja Qureiris**, detained since 2014 when he was only 13, was released following the expiry of his sentence. Qureiris had earlier been at risk of execution but was subsequently sentenced to eight years in prison, on charges that included participating in protests at the age of 10. He remains under an eight-year travel ban.

In a worsening trend, and as an illustration of the cruelty of the Saudi authorities, many prisoners of conscience are continuing to be arbitrarily detained even after their unjust prison sentences have expired. This is not a new phenomenon in Saudi Arabia, despite the fact that it violates even the kingdom's own domestic legislation: Article 2 of the Law of Criminal Procedure (LCP) outlaws the practice.

Some of those detained long beyond their sentences' expiry were eventually released in 2022. Journalist **Fahad al-Suneidi**, for example, arrested on 11 September 2017, was released from prison on 3 February 2022, approximately one year after the completion of his three-and-a-half-year sentence on charges relating to free speech. Human rights activist **Fahad al-Fahad** was released on the same day, roughly one year after his five-year sentence

had expired. Al-Fahad was detained in April 2016 and sentenced on charges relating to his peaceful activism, including "inciting people against the Crown Prince by calling for demonstrations and rallies". He is now under a 10-year travel ban.

Similarly, Palestinian poet and artist **Ashraf Fayadh**, whose sentence had expired in October 2021, was finally released on 23 August 2022. Fayadh had been detained in Saudi Arabia since January 2014 and sentenced to death for publishing poems; this was later commuted to an eight-year prison term. He is still in Saudi Arabia at the time of publishing this report. And former Palestinian official **Mohammed al-Khudari**, whose prison sentence expired in February 2022, was finally released on 19 October. Al-Khudari was arrested in April 2019 and sentenced in 2021 to 15 years in prison, reduced on appeal to six years with half the term suspended, in the context of a mass trial marred by serious due process violations. Al-Khudari is critically ill with cancer, yet the authorities persistently denied him essential medical treatment while in prison (see section 6, Prisoners and Detainees at Risk, page 21). He is now in Jordan with his family.



Fahad al-Suneidi



Ashraf Fayadh

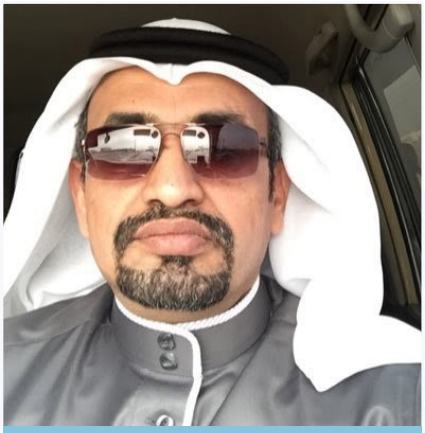


Mohammed al-Khudari

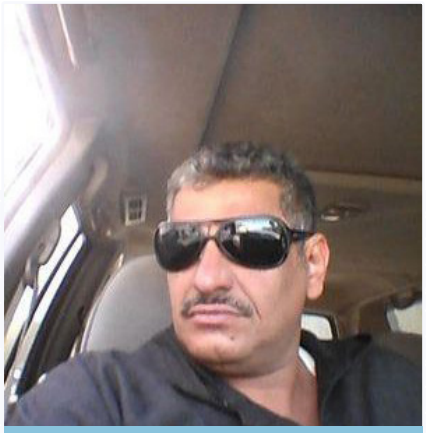
Prisoners still being held beyond expiry of their prison terms

Some prisoners of conscience in Saudi Arabia, however, remain arbitrarily detained at the time of publishing this report despite their prison sentences having expired long ago. Journalists **Ahmad al-Sawian** and **Mosad al-Kathiri**, arrested in September 2017 during a crackdown on dissent, have completed three and three-and-a-half-year sentences respectively based on charges relating to free speech, yet they are still behind bars more than two years later.

In a further worrying development, some detainees due to be released have instead been denied any outside contact and thus subjected to enforced disappearance. They include human rights defenders **Essa al-Nukheifi** and **Mohammed al-Qahtani**, whose sentences expired in October and November 2022 respectively (see section 6, Prisoners and Detainees at Risk, page 21). The fate of others due to be released, including human rights activist **Abdulaziz al-Sunaidi**, whose sentence expired in November 2022, is unknown. Meanwhile, others awaiting release have been resentenced, including **Mohammed al-Rabiah** (see section 7, Unfair Trials and Harsh Sentences, page 25).



Essa al-Nukheifi



Abdulaziz al-Sunaidi



Mohammed al-Rabiah

Ongoing travel bans

Many prisoners of conscience who have been released in recent years continue to face heavy restrictions, notably travel bans that prevent them from leaving the country. As well as imposing such bans on individuals on their release from prison, usually in advance as part of their judicial sentence, the Saudi authorities continued in 2022 to impose arbitrary travel bans on detainees' family members as well, preventing them too from leaving the country in a form of collective punishment.

A selective list of Saudi activists and civil society members released from prison but banned from foreign travel

Name	Description	Date of release	Length of travel ban
Essam Koshak	Human rights defender	Late January 2021	Four years
Loujain al-Hathloul	Woman human rights defender	10 February 2021	Five years
Alaa Brinji	Journalist	Late February 2021	Eight years
Nassima al-Sadah	Woman human rights defender	27 June 2021	Five years
Samar Badawi	Woman human rights defender	27 June 2021	Five years
Abdul Rahman al-Shumayri	Academic	23 September 2021	15 years
Ali al-Nimr	Child protestor	27 October 2021	Ten years
Abdullah al-Zaher	Child protestor	14 November 2021	Ten years
Dawoud al-Marhoun	Child protestor	2 February 2022	Ten years

Fahad al-Fahad	Human rights defender	3 February 2022	Ten years
Naima al-Matrood	Woman protestor	11 February 2022	Six years
Raif Badawi	Blogger	11 March 2022	Ten years
Murtaja Qureiris	Child protestor	24 June 2022	Eight years
Nadhir al-Majed	Writer	23 July 2022	Seven years
Abdulkarim al-Khodr	Human rights defender	7 January 2023	Ten years
Abdulrahman al-Hamid	Human rights defender	9 January 2023	Nine years

6. Prisoners and Detainees at Risk



For all of those trapped inside Saudi Arabia's harsh prison system, conditions are notoriously poor. Prisoners of conscience, however, often also face cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment behind bars. In 2022, we again saw the Saudi authorities place the lives of targeted prisoners at risk through reckless negligence, wilful mistreatment, enforced disappearance and deliberate medical neglect.

Attacks on prisoners

2022 saw the Saudi authorities continuing to show a reckless, if not deliberate and vindictive, disregard for the safety of certain prisoners of conscience against whom they appeared to be seeking revenge. An example of this occurred in May 2022, when the Al-Ha'ir Prison administration deliberately placed prisoners of conscience including **Mohammed al-Qahtani**, **Essa al-Nukhaifi**, **Fawzan al-Harbi** and **Mohammed al-Hudaif** on a wing for prisoners with mental disorders, despite requests from the prisoners to be moved to another wing.

Following this, on 26 May, Mohammed al-Qahtani was beaten up by a man from the wing with mental health issues, before the other prisoners intervened to stop the attack and protect al-Qahtani. This was not the first attack of its kind. In 2021, one of the mentally ill prisoners had previously attempted to start a fire on the wing during the time al-Qahtani was being held there, before some of the other detainees rushed to the scene and brought the fire under control.

These incidents are particularly worrying because they appear to be orchestrated by the Saudi authorities. The evidence for such a view includes the horrendous and fatal attack on **Musa al-Qarni** in Dhahban Prison, Jeddah, in October 2021; the deliberate medical neglect of **Abdullah al-Hamid** in Al-Ha'ir Prison that led to his death in April 2020; the COVID-19-related death in May 2021 of **Zaheer Shareeda**; and the assault on **Khaled al-Omair** in July 2021.



Musa al-Qarni



Abdullah al-Hamid



Khaled al-Omair

Enforced disappearances

The practice of enforced disappearance is systematic and widespread in Saudi Arabia, and continued to be extensively applied by the Saudi authorities in 2022 to prisoners of conscience, including those due for release. **Mohammed al-Qahtani** completed his 10-year prison sentence, on charges relating to his peaceful human rights work, on 22 November 2022, yet has remained forcibly disappeared since 24 October up to the time of publishing this report. The Saudi authorities have been denying him any contact with his family and refusing to give any information about him or his whereabouts. His family suspect that this is in reprisal for his filing a complaint about the repeated assaults he has faced in prison (as described above).

In another illustration of the authorities' punitive treatment of prisoners of conscience, detained activist **Essa al-Nukheifi** has been forcibly disappeared from 15 October until now, since he announced a hunger strike in protest over not being released from jail when his six-year sentence expired in September 2022. His family has not been allowed any contact with him or received news of his whereabouts since then. Given that the Saudi authorities have recently retried several prisoners and increased their sentences, there are concerns that al-Qahtani and al-Nukheifi may similarly face further harsh punishment. While disappeared they are also at heightened risk of other human rights violations, such as physical torture.

The practice of enforced disappearance is used by the authorities to silence activists and other critics, and forms part of a larger pattern where arbitrary arrests are followed by shorter or longer periods of enforced disappearance before victims reappear to face trial and may then disappear again. Sometimes disappearances last a very long time, raising even greater concerns for the safety and fate of the victims. Examples include humanitarian worker **Abdulrahman al-Sadhan**, who was arrested by secret police in March 2018 from his workplace at the headquarters of the Saudi Red Crescent in Riyadh and forcibly disappeared for 23 months. Since an appeal court appearance in August 2021, al-Sadhan, who was sentenced in April that year to 20 years for peaceful comments on Twitter, has been forcibly disappeared once again, with the authorities denying him any contact with his family.

Another example is preacher **Sulaiman al-Dowaish**, who was arrested on 22 April 2016 after posting on Twitter comments critical of King Salman and Mohammed bin Salman, and brutally tortured by high-ranking officials at an unofficial prison in Riyadh. The last reported sighting of al-Dowaish was in July 2018. Nothing has been heard of him, or his health or whereabouts, since then; he remains forcibly disappeared.



Mohammed al-Qahtani



Abdulrahman al-Sadhan



Sulaiman al-Dowaish

Ill-treatment and harassment leading to hunger strikes

In 2022, as in previous years, the harassment and intimidation that prisoners of conscience face in prison sometimes led them to stage individual or collective hunger strikes to demand their rights and seek improvements in conditions. Between 17-30 April, and again from 15-19 May, human rights activist **Essa al-Nukhaifi** undertook hunger strikes in Al-Ha'ir Prison to protest against the prison administration's vindictive delays in letting him out to complete some banking transactions in relation to his salary and ID card renewal. Al-Nukhaifi's family

failed to receive his salary for several months because his ID card had expired, so this deliberate foot-dragging caused his wife and children unnecessary hardship. Al-Nukhaifi staged another hunger strike in October in protest against his ongoing detention a week beyond expiry of his prison term, as did human rights defender **Mohammed al-Rabiah** in September for similar reasons.

On 23 May **Shadli al-Huwaiti**, brother of Abdul Rahim al-Huwaiti who was killed by security forces in 2020, went on hunger strike in protest against ill-treatment and solitary confinement. Shadli and several family members have been detained since February 2020 for opposing eviction from their homes to make way for the Neom megacity project. In June he was force-fed through a tube, which is considered cruel and inhuman treatment. (For more on violations against members of the Huwaitat tribe, see page 38).

Denial of medical treatment

The lives of prisoners in Saudi jails are also unnecessarily endangered through the deliberate denial of medical treatment, which has led to a number of deaths in detention in recent years, such as that of iconic human rights defender Abdullah al-Hamid in April 2020. In March 2022, the Saudi authorities arbitrarily stopped 85-year-old political prisoner **Mohammed Saleh al-Khudari**'s hormone treatment for prostate cancer, in callous disregard for his life. The jailed former Palestinian official had not seen a specialist consultant or had any medical tests or assessments for two years, despite repeated appeals from his family as his health continued to deteriorate. The Abha Prison administration nevertheless persisted in ignoring his medical needs, and even denied him health supplements brought in for him by visitors. Al-Khudari was finally released in October.

Also in October, the Saudi authorities prevented detained human rights defender **Waleed Abu al-Khair** from receiving medication and visiting a hospital. Abu al-Khair, who is serving a 15-year prison sentence for his activism, has routinely faced various forms of ill-treatment in prison, including being held in solitary confinement, and has previously undertaken several hunger strikes.

Many other prisoners of conscience continue to suffer from deliberate medical neglect on the part of the authorities, including cleric **Mohammad al-Habib**. Habib's health has been deteriorating in Dammam Prison due to a lack of adequate health care for sciatica and severe back and head pain that he suffers as a result of torture following his arrest in 2016. The authorities are denying him essential medication.

7. Unfair Trials and Harsh Sentences



Throughout the year, and especially from mid-2022 onwards as diplomatic relations with Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman normalised, the Saudi courts handed down a number of unprecedentedly long prison sentences to individuals exercising their right to free speech. The Saudi judicial system is notorious for its rampant abuses and disregard of legal safeguards, but these were some of the longest known prison sentences ever passed against peaceful activists (or anyone else) in the kingdom. They thus signalled a new phase of repression and marked a new low for human rights in the country.

Wave of harsh sentences for exercising the right to free speech

Early in 2022, the Saudi authorities sentenced lawyer and activist **Mut'ib bin Zafir al-Amri** to seven years in prison for his peaceful media work and human rights activism. Al-Amri was sentenced by the Specialised Criminal Court (SCC) on charges of "inflaming public opinion, and criticising the symbols of the state" because of criticisms and calls for reform he posted on the Twitter account @Future_review. He was also found guilty of communicating with foreign parties considered "hostile" by the court, a reference to human rights organisations like ALQST and activists abroad such as ALQST's founder, Yahya Assiri. Al-Amri, who has been detained in Dhahban Prison since 2018, was also subjected to severe physical and psychological torture of various kinds, including beatings and electric shocks.

Judicial proceedings in Saudi Arabia

Judicial proceedings in Saudi Arabia routinely fall short of international standards and fair trial guarantees. Common violations include the denial of access to lawyers and court documents, undue delays, and the holding of trials in secret. Both the regular criminal courts and the Specialised Criminal Court (SCC), an exceptional jurisdiction set up in 2008 to try cases of terrorism, are notorious for their disregard of legal safeguards.

From mid-2022 on, a number of particularly harsh sentences were handed down in the Saudi courts. This closely followed the final diplomatic rehabilitation of Crown Prince and de facto ruler Mohammed bin Salman, culminating in the July visit to Riyadh of US President Joe Biden. On 9 August, the Specialised Criminal Court of Appeal sentenced women's rights activist and academic **Salma al-Shehab** to 34 years in prison to be followed by a travel ban of the same length, for tweeting in support of women's rights and calling for respect for basic rights. The charges against her included "supporting those who seek to disrupt the public order" and publishing tweets "that disrupt the public order", in connection with posts on her account where she expressed support for prisoners of conscience such as women's rights activist **Loujain al-Hathloul**. The sentence included closure of her Twitter account and deactivation of her phone number.

Al-Shehab, a 34-year-old mother of two, is a dental hygienist and PhD student at Leeds University in the United Kingdom, where she was a resident before her detention. She was arrested on 15 January 2021 while on holiday in Saudi Arabia, then subjected to solitary confinement and lengthy sessions of questioning over a period of nine and a half months before being brought before the SCC. Al-Shehab belongs to the country's Shi'a Muslim minority, who have long suffered government repression. She was sentenced under the kingdom's draconian Counter-Terrorism and Anti-Cyber Crime Laws, which contain vaguely formulated provisions that criminalise the rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly. Al-Shehab was initially handed a six-year sentence in March 2022, 14 months after being detained, but her sentence was massively increased during the appeal process. This ruling is subject to further appeal in the Supreme Court.

Also on 9 August 2022, the Specialised Criminal Court of Appeal sentenced **Nourah Saeed al-Qahtani** to 45 years in jail and a 45-year travel ban. Al-Qahtani, a 49-year old mother of five, was arrested on 4 July 2021 and sentenced by the SCC (of first instance) in February 2022 to a 13-year jail term, to be followed on release by a 13-year ban on travelling abroad.

The charges brought against her in the original trial included "incitement to participate in the activities of those seeking to disrupt public order and undermine the security of society and the stability of the state", "posting false and tendentious tweets", and "calling for the release of detainees". On 9 August, however, the SCC Court of Appeal not only upheld the previous verdict but added further charges including "seeking to undermine the social fabric and national kinship and disrupting society's cohesion and public order". On this basis it then increased al-Qahtani's sentence to 45 years in prison – 43 years based on various articles of the Counter-Terrorism Law and a year based on Article 6 of the Anti-Cybercrime Law, plus a discretionary extra year added by the judge – to be followed by a 45-year travel ban on her release.

That same month, the SCC Appeal Court sentenced writer, translator and computer programmer **Osama Khaled**, detained since 2020, to a jail term of 32 years – increased on appeal from an initial five-year sentence – on charges relating to the right to free speech. On 21 August, Egyptian doctor **Sabry Shalaby** was sentenced to 20 years in prison, on a charge of voting for the late former Egyptian President Mohammed Morsi. Shalaby, who worked for the Saudi Ministry of Health from 2006-2019, was arrested in January 2020.

In September 2022, the SCC Appeal Court sentenced Tunisian nurse Mahdia Marzougui to 15 years in prison on charges relating to her social media activity, including retweeting and sharing posts on Twitter and Facebook. Also in September, blogger **Dawood al-Ali**, owner of the Twitter account @dawood1972, was sentenced to 25 years in prison. He had been arrested in December 2020 following tweets in which he criticised normalisation with Israel.

On 3 October 2022, **Saad Ibrahim al-Madhi**, a 72-year-old man who holds dual Saudi and US citizenship, was sentenced by the SCC to 16 years and three months in prison, in addition to a travel ban of the same length, on charges including "undermining the security of the state". The ruling is subject to appeal. Al-Madhi was arrested at King Khalid International Airport on 21 November 2021.

On 10 October 2022, the SCC passed prison sentences ranging from 10 to 18 years on ten Egyptian nationals belonging to Nubian civic associations in Saudi Arabia, for organising a peaceful commemorative ceremony event. The ten individuals, including **Adel Sayed Ibrahim Fakir**, the current head of the Nubian community in Riyadh and a long-term resident in Saudi Arabia, and **Farajallah Ahmed Yousef**, the previous head of Riyadh's Nubian community, were arrested in July 2020 in connection with an event held in Riyadh to mark the anniversary of the October 1973 War. They were held incommunicado until September 2020, and arbitrarily held for over one year without being brought to court, before eventually going on trial in November 2021. Several hearings were held throughout 2022 and the verdict was issued in October, subject to appeal.

In November, the SCC sentenced **Abdullah Jelan** to 10 years in jail and a travel ban of the same length. Jelan, a graduate of West Chester University in the United States, was forcibly

arrested by State Security forces on 12 May 2021 on his return to Saudi Arabia from the United States. Jelan had been vocal on Twitter, through an anonymous account, advocating for fundamental freedoms in Saudi Arabia. During interrogation he was subjected to torture, including through use of an electric rod, and he was denied any contact with his family and the outside world.

Three members of the Huwaitat tribe, who peacefully resisted eviction to make way for construction of the Neom megacity project, were sentenced to execution; others received jail sentences of up to 50 years (see section 9, Forced Evictions and Displacement, page 37).

A selective list of Saudi prisoners of conscience serving lengthy jail terms

Name	Description	Date of Arrest	Prison sentence
Mohammed al-Qahtani	Human rights defender	9 March 2013	10 years
Wajdi al-Ghazzawi	Journalist	1 August 2012	12 years
Fadhel al-Manasef	Blogger and human rights activist	2 October 2011	14 years
Mohammed al-Habib	Cleric	8 July 2016	12 years
Issa al-Hamid	Human rights defender	16 September 2017	11 years
Israa al-Ghomgham	Woman activist	December 2015	13 years
Waleed Abu al-Khair	Human rights defender	15 April 2014	15 years

Abdullah Jelan	University graduate	12 May 2021	10 years
Essam al-Zamel	Economist	12 September 2017	15 years
Mousa al-Hashim	Protestor	6 December 2015	17 years
Adel Sayed Ibrahim Fakir	Head of the Nubian community in Riyadh	14 July 2020	14 years
Mohammed al-Oteibi	Human rights defender	24 May 2017	17 years
Mohammed al-Rabiah	Human rights defender	15 May 2018	17 years
Saad Ibrahim al-Madhi	Dual US-Saudi citizen who was critical on Twitter	21 November 2021	16 years and three months
Abdelrahman Farhaneh	Jordanian journalist	22 February 2019	19 years
Abdulrahman al-Sadhan	Humanitarian worker	12 March 2018	20 years
Saud al-Hashimi	Academic	2 February 2007	30 years
Osama Khaled	Writer, translator and computer programmer	2020	32 years

Salma al-Shehab	Academic and women's rights activist	15 January 2021	34 years
Nourah Saeed al-Qahtani	Saudi mother and housewife	4 July 2021	45 years

Sentences increased on appeal or shortly before due release date

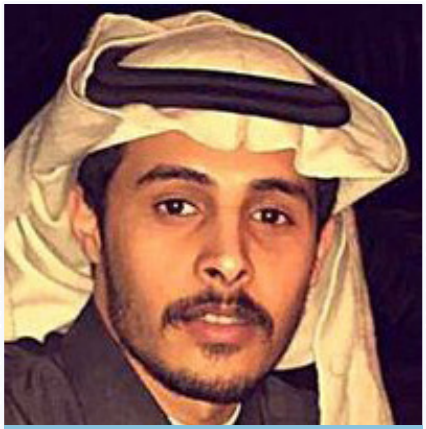
Many sentences were dramatically lengthened on appeal in 2022 in the SCC Court of Appeal or the Supreme Court, a growing trend that is clearly likely to deter unjustly detained individuals from appealing their wrongful convictions. As well as cases where the penalty was increased before the appeals process was exhausted and the sentence made final (and this was a notable trend in 2022), there were others where the Saudi authorities actually increased the sentences, and thus extended the detention, of those already serving and indeed nearing the end of their prison terms. In mid-2022 the Court of Appeal increased the prison term of human rights activist **Israa al-Ghomgham** from eight to 13 years. Similarly, **Khaled al-Odah**, arrested in September 2017 after tweeting about his brother, the Islamic cleric Salman al-Odah, had his initial five-year sentence, which was due to expire in July 2022, increased. And blogger **Abdulaziz al-Odah**, arrested in September 2019 after publishing comments on his Twitter account, had his five-year sentence (half suspended) increased to five years (without suspension).



Israa al-Ghomgham



Khaled al-Odah



Abdulaziz al-Odah

In late September 2022, the Supreme Court accepted a request filed by the Public Prosecution to retry human rights activist **Mohammed al-Rabiah**, meaning that his case was transferred back to the SCC despite having recently completed his prison term. In early December, the SCC sentenced him to 17 years in prison. Al-Rabiah was arrested on 15 May 2018, during a spate of arrests of women human rights defenders including **Loujain al-Hathloul** and **Aziza al-Yousef**, and was sentenced on 20 April 2021 by the SCC to six and a half years in prison from the date of his detention, with two years suspended, on charges relating to his peaceful activism and defence of women's rights. This meant that he should have been released in September 2022. He has also been subjected to brutal torture in detention.

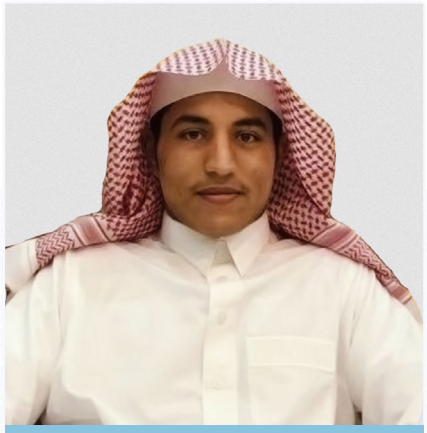
Earlier in the year, **Abdulrahman al-Dowaish**, son of the missing preacher Sulaiman al-Dowaish, was sentenced to two years in prison for enquiring about the fate of his father. On 3 February the Court of Appeal upheld the sentence, which was originally handed down, unannounced, by the Criminal Court on 9 December 2021. Abdulrahman was arrested after sending a text message to Badr al-Asaker, director of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's private office, to ask for information about his father Sulaiman, who has been forcibly disappeared by the authorities since 2016. Abdulrahman was arrested on 18 October 2021 and forcibly disappeared. His trial, on charges under the Anti-Cybercrime Law, began on 5 November 2021 behind closed doors, without his family present.



Loujain al-Hathloul



Aziza al-Yousef



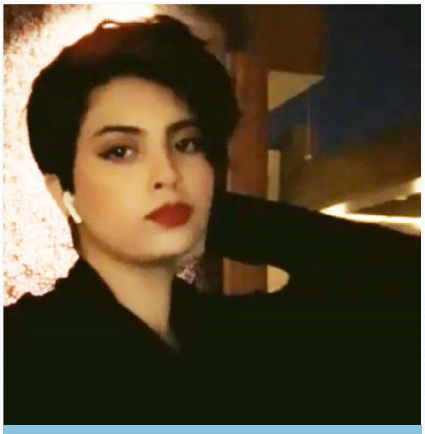
Abdulrahman al-Dowaish

News also continued to emerge of individuals sentenced in previous years. In late 2021 the Supreme Court sentenced journalist **Maha al-Rafidi** to six years in prison, and a travel ban of the same length, for her activity on Twitter in support of human rights. She was initially sentenced by the SCC to five years in prison, half of it suspended. The amended sentence means that al-Rafidi, arrested in September 2019, is now not expected to be released until July 2025.

Lengthy pre-trial detention and prolonged trials

In light of the unprecedented jail sentences recently issued against peaceful activists and others in Saudi Arabia merely for exercising their right to freedom of expression, there are heightened concerns for those who remain in arbitrary detention without charge or are facing prolonged trials or retrial.

Many of the young activists and bloggers arrested in May and June 2021 who had been peacefully expressing their opinions online, including **Abdulrahman al-Sheikhi**, **Asma al-Subeaei**, **Rina Abdulaziz**, **Yasmine al-Ghufaili**, **Najwa al-Humaid**, and **Lina al-Sharif**, remain in pre-trial detention more than a year after their arrests. Al-Sharif currently faces charges under the kingdom's draconian Counter-Terrorism Law, but has not yet been brought to court. Others have been held in extended detention for even longer, including human rights defender **Mohammed al-Bejadi**, who despite spending more than four years in detention since his arrest in May 2018 has still not been charged or brought to court.



Rina Abdulaziz



Yasmine al-Ghufaili



Lina al-Sharif



Mohammed al-Bejadi



Salman al-Odah



Hassan Farhan al-Maliki

Such practices are grave violations of international human rights standards and even the kingdom's own laws. Under the Saudi Law of Criminal Procedure (LCP), the Public Prosecutor can extend detention up to a maximum of six months in total, after which the detainee must be either released or referred to court. However, Article 19 of the Counter-Terrorism Law effectively removes this upper limit on pre-trial custody for those suspected of ill-defined terrorist crimes.

Meanwhile, prisoners of conscience in Saudi Arabia who have been referred to court continue to have their trials endlessly prolonged. Those in this situation include Islamic scholars Salman al-Odah and Hassan Farhan al-Maliki, both detained in September 2017, whose trials have continued to drag on for unknown reasons. In both cases the Public Prosecutor is calling for the death penalty, based on a range of vaguely formulated charges. The most recent development, on 16 October 2022, was that the SCC again postponed hearing the case of al-Maliki, without setting a new date.

Trial of Jamal Khashoggi's killers

On 7 April 2022, in what ALQST saw as a slap in the face for justice, a Turkish court issued a ruling to suspend the trial of 26 people accused over the killing of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi in the Saudi consulate in Istanbul in 2018, and to transfer the case to Saudi Arabia. In the battle to hold the perpetrators of Khashoggi's murder to account, the trial in Turkey was no replacement for the independent, international criminal investigation ALQST has long called for. Yet, in the absence of justice thus far, including a total miscarriage of justice in the Saudi courts, the Turkish trial offered the chance of at least some justice. Referring the case back to the Saudi kingdom makes it once again appear likely that the guilty will go unpunished.

8. Use of the Death Penalty

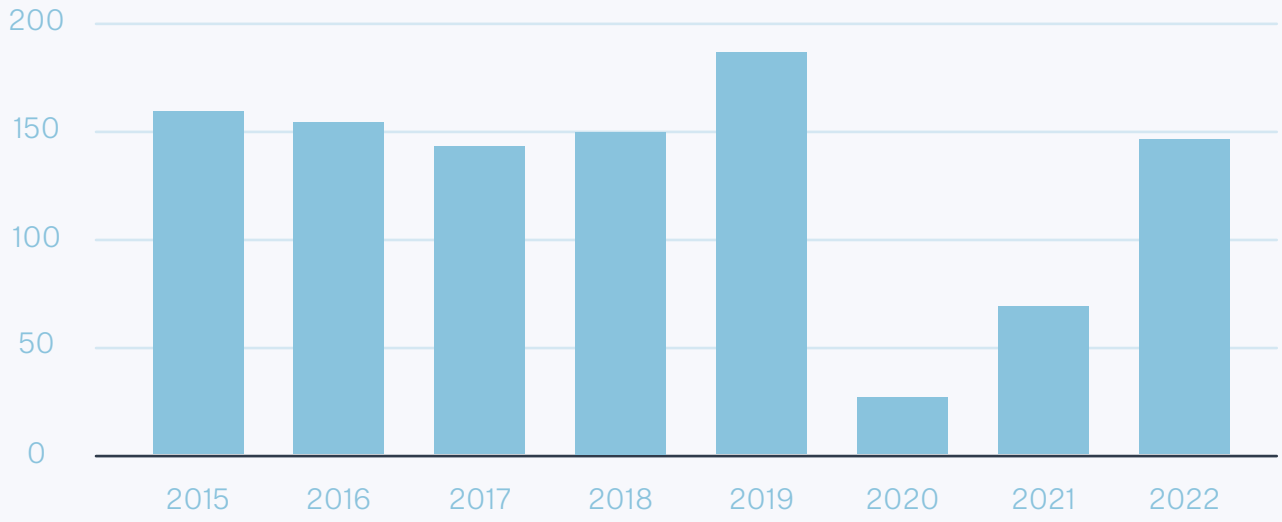


The Saudi state executed 148 individuals during 2022, more than twice as many as in 2021. Executions for drugs-related offences made a dramatic comeback, with 20 individuals executed between 10 and 23 November, despite the announcement in January 2021 of a moratorium on use of the death penalty for such non-violent crimes. Meanwhile, further death sentences have been issued for crimes allegedly committed by minors, destroying the authorities' claims to have discontinued use of the death penalty for juveniles.

Execution spike

Saudi Arabia has for many years been among the countries carrying out the highest numbers of executions in the world. In 2022 the authorities conducted 148 executions, including the execution of 81 men on a single day, 12 March, in the third mass execution since King Salman came to the throne in January 2015. The total of 148 was more than twice the number (67) carried out in 2021, and marks a return to the exceptionally high figures recorded between 2015 and 2019. Of the 148 individuals executed all but one were male, and 36 (24%) were non-Saudi nationals from a variety of Arab, African and South Asian countries.

Executions in Saudi Arabia



The Saudi authorities' execution of 81 men on 12 March marked the largest mass execution recorded in recent decades. Those executed were convicted of a wide range of offences, including "terrorist" crimes, murder, armed robbery and arms smuggling. A number were also convicted on charges such as "disrupting the social fabric and national cohesion" and "participating in and inciting sit-ins and protests", in reference to acts that are protected by the rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association.

At least 41 of the 81 belonged to the country's Shi'a Muslim minority, who have long suffered violent repression from the government. This shocking act was yet another demonstration of the authorities' use of the death penalty to silence dissent in the Shi'a-majority Eastern Province.

Drugs-related executions make a comeback

Executions for drugs-related offences also made a dramatic comeback in Saudi Arabia in 2022, despite the announcement in January 2021 of a moratorium on use of the death penalty for such non-violent crimes. Between 10 and 23 November, the authorities executed 20 men – eight Saudi Arabians and 12 foreign nationals, from Pakistan, Syria Jordan, and Nigeria – for drug smuggling or trafficking. Their death sentences were all handed down at the discretion of a judge *(ta'ziran)*, in the continuing absence of a statutory penal code.

The resumption of capital punishment for drugs-related crimes, after a 22-month hiatus, demonstrates the Saudi authorities' disregard for the right to life and makes a mockery of

their previous announcement of a moratorium on such executions. That announcement, made by the government-sponsored Saudi Human Rights Commission (HRC), was never followed up with an official change of policy, so it was always possible that such executions would resume.

An end to the death penalty for minors: official claims destroyed

The Saudi authorities have also failed to deliver on what have proved to be false promises in relation to the death penalty for juveniles. While the HRC had previously insisted in October 2020 that "no one in Saudi Arabia will be executed for a crime committed as a minor", several death sentences handed down since then have destroyed the authorities' claims to have discontinued use of the death penalty for minors.

On 2 March 2022, the Criminal Court in Tabuk handed down a new death sentence against **Abdullah al-Huwaiti** for offences allegedly committed when he was only 14 years old. The ruling was upheld by the Appeals Court on 13 June, putting al-Huwaiti at imminent risk of execution. In November 2021, the Supreme Court had overturned a death sentence handed down previously to al-Huwaiti by the Tabuk Criminal Court in November 2019. Not only did the alleged offences, of murder and armed robbery, take place when al-Huwaiti was only 14, but the court proceedings against him were marred by numerous violations of international fair trial guarantees, including by relying on confessions allegedly extracted under torture. In January 2023 al-Huwaiti's case was transferred back to the Criminal Court in Tabuk at the request of the Supreme Court. At the time of writing this report the fate of al-Huwaiti, now 20 years old, hangs in the balance. The outcome of his case will be a further test of the authorities' claim to no longer apply the death penalty to juvenile offenders.

Individuals at risk of execution

Dozens more detainees remain at risk of execution. On 7 April 2022 the Supreme Court upheld death sentences against two young Bahrainis, **Jaafar Sultan** and **Sadiq Thamer**, who are now at imminent risk of execution. The SCC had sentenced Sultan and Thamer to death *ta'ziran* (at the judge's discretion) on 7 October 2021 on terrorism and protest-related charges, following an unfair trial; their sentences were upheld by the Court of Appeal on 11 January 2022. From the moment of their arrest on 8 May 2015, the two young men have been subjected to violations of their rights including enforced disappearance, torture, being forced to make confessions, and denial of access to legal counsel.

On 2 October, the SCC also handed down death sentences against three members of the Huwaitat tribe – **Shadli**, **Ibrahim** and **Ataullah al-Huwaiti** – whose family, along with several others, have been forcibly evicted and displaced to make way for the Neom megaproject being pursued by the Saudi authorities. Shadli al-Huwaiti is the brother of Abdul Rahim al-Huwaiti, shot dead by security forces in April 2020 in his home in al-Khariba (see following section, Forced Evictions and Displacement).

9. Forced Evictions and Displacement



Land seizures and forced displacement are longstanding practices of the Saudi authorities. In the course of their unlawful acquisition of land and properties, often on sites earmarked for state development projects such as the grandiose Neom megacity, they routinely trample on residents' rights, including the right to compensation. During 2022 the authorities continued to expropriate land and forcibly evict residents, most notably in Jeddah, and to wage an extraordinary campaign of prosecutions against members of the Huwaitat tribe who protested against such treatment in April 2020.

Jeddah demolitions

Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's Vision 2030 economic plan includes the $20 billion Jeddah Central development project, which aims to remodel several neighbourhoods in the historic port city of Jeddah with luxury high rises and upmarket entertainment venues. Between October 2021 and May 2022, the authorities carried out large-scale evictions and demolition of properties affecting more than half a million people.

The Saudi authorities claimed, without evidence, that the purpose of the demolitions was to allow the redevelopment of run-down urban areas plagued by crime and lawlessness and to improve the quality of life for citizens. However ALQST carried out a survey that painted a very different picture, showing the devastating impact of these actions. Over 90% of the respondents had had either residential or commercial properties demolished.

Despite the authorities' claims that the residents of the demolished houses had no proof of ownership, 85% of those surveyed said they possessed a document proving their ownership. Moreover, the remaining 15% talked about the difficulty of dealing with the administrative issues involved, and how little interest the authorities had shown in producing or issuing copies for them of title deeds or equivalent documents.

The authorities also claimed that all the residents were given advance notice of the demolitions. 60% of participants said they had received notification in advance of the demolition, though some said the time between notification and demolition had been extremely short. Meanwhile, almost 40% said they had not received any notification at all. Others said they were driven out of their homes when the electricity and water were cut off. Indeed, more than half of those surveyed said they were forced out with the threat of being sent to prison if the eviction order was not carried out.

Although the Saudi authorities had launched a compensation scheme in January 2022, many weeks later almost two-thirds of the survey respondents said they had not been given clear information about the procedure for submitting claims for compensation for the demolition of their properties, nor been assisted in obtaining alternative accommodation. Over 70% said they had not been told financial compensation was available, and they had not been given any money. This may have been because the compensation scheme applied only to Saudi nationals owning property, excluding and discriminating against the large number of foreign nationals living in the area.

The small proportion of survey participants who said they had been provided with alternative accommodation reported that it consisted of a two-bedroom flat shared with another family. Many struggled to find alternative schools for their children in the areas they had moved to, some of which were remote and beyond the reach of public services. Some of those who had been forced out of their homes said they had gone a whole month without finding alternative accommodation, and that rents had shot up to unaffordable levels. Others said they had found alternative housing but it was very expensive, and they had had to pay their own deposit on the rent after the authorities refused to pay the promised compensation, on the grounds that they earned high enough salaries to cover their expenses.

These examples represent only a fraction of the demolitions that have taken place without prior warning or consultation, and many other properties and inhabitants may be similarly at risk. This repeated pattern of forcible evictions, with associated violations and lack of transparency, shows a consistent and systematic approach by the authorities in their dealings with homeowners that fails to respect their rights to housing, and provides no means of obtaining justice for those who submit complaints. This is particularly relevant in view of the ongoing implementation of Vision 2030, as it foresees many more development projects that are likely to be accompanied by similar human rights abuses.

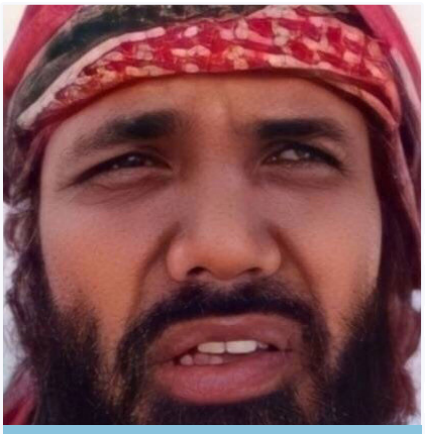
Violations accompanying the Neom megacity project

The Saudi authorities have repeatedly committed violations in their bid to remove local inhabitants from their land and homes in order to proceed with the Neom megacity project, part of the crown prince's Vision 2030 programme. The area earmarked for the project, in the Tabuk region of north-western Saudi Arabia on the Red Sea, has been inhabited for centuries primarily by members of the Huwaitat tribe. Drone footage released in October 2022 has shown work gradually commencing on Neom.

To realise this project, the Saudi authorities have illegally displaced local tribes without adequate compensation or the offer of alternative housing, and violently cracked down on members of the tribe who peacefully opposed or resisted eviction. Since the notorious killing of local resident Abdul Rahim al-Huwaiti in a raid by special forces on his home in 2020, ALQST has documented the arbitrary arrests and unfair trials of dozens of other members of the tribe. In the course of 2022 at least 14 members of the tribe, including one woman, were sentenced to prison terms of between 15 and 50 years, including the Specialised Criminal Court of Appeal's sentencing in August of both **Abdulilah Rashid Ibrahim al-Huwaiti** and **Abdullah Dakhil Allah al-Huwaiti** to 50 years in prison. At least three members of the tribe have been sentenced to death for peacefully resisting the forcible displacement of their tribe and speaking out against the injustices inflicted on them by the Saudi authorities; the death sentences were upheld on appeal on 23 January 2023. ALQST has made a detailed investigation into these violations, entitled *The Dark Side of Neom: Expropriation, expulsion and prosecution of the region's inhabitants,* based on first-hand testimonies from victims and witnesses as well as open-source data.



Ibrahim al-Huwaiti



Ataullah al-Huwaiti



Shadli al-Huwaiti

10. Women's Rights



On 8 March 2022, Saudi Arabia passed its first Personal Status (or Family) Law (PSL), one of four new laws announced by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman in 2021 that he said were to "reform the kingdom's judicial institutions". 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, however, while bringing some welcome clarity to the matter, unfortunately serves to codify rather than abolish many restrictive elements of the male guardianship system, despite the authorities' claims that it represents a major reform. Far from having been dismantled, many features of the oppressive male guardianship system remain in place, their legal status now enhanced by codification, so that women continue to be subjected to male control.

Male guardianship system far from dismantled

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.

Moreover, gender-based violence continues to have a devastating impact on many women's lives. Gender-based violence is not adequately defined in law and criminalised, and recent reforms that are supposed to protect women from abuse lack adequate means of enforcement, leaving many 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".

For example, 24-year-old Shaimaa al-Baqmi, who for years had been a victim of domestic violence, including beatings by her father, brothers and uncles and threats to kill her, has been missing since April 2022. People close to her believe this is because of her family filing a malicious complaint against her, after she ran away from the family home in October 2021 to live independently in accommodation of her own. She was last heard from in April while on her way to work: she did not arrive at work that day, and there has been no contact from her since. It is suspected that she was arrested.

Girls' and Women's "Care Institutions" in Saudi Arabia (Dar al-Re'aya)

A complaint against a woman made by her male guardian can lead to her being detained in Dar al-Re'aya. As explained in a detailed report on Saudi prisons by ALQST, these government establishments are purportedly tasked with providing care and social discipline, strengthening religious affiliation, and delivering education, training and healthcare for 'delinquent' girls and women up to the age of 30. They may be detained there pending investigation or trial, or if a judge decides they should remain in one of these facilities. The reasons for which girls and young women are referred to Dar al-Re'aya include *taghayyub* (being absent, "absconding" or running away from home), engaging in an act of "moral indecency" such as extramarital sexual relations, or *'uquq* (disobeying a parent or male guardian).

ALQST has documented several causes of concern for the well-being of young female prisoners in women's "care institutions", including cases of abuse and neglect such as malnutrition, poor health and hygiene conditions, denigration, mistreatment, brutality, and frequent use of solitary confinement. Concerns over conditions in these institutions for young women have periodically surfaced in Saudi media and online. Several cases of suicide or attempted suicide have been reported.

Khamis Mushait assault

ALQST was deeply concerned to see video footage on social media on 31 August 2022 that showed Saudi security and police officers, both uniformed and in civilian clothing, assaulting young women in the Social Education Home (orphanage) in Khamis Mushait, Asir Province. According to the person posting the video material, the attack on the women came after they staged a sit-in and strike in protest over poor living conditions and the various ways

in which the rights of young women are violated when they are kept in the home even on reaching adulthood.

The local authority, Asir Emirate, issued a statement ordering an investigation into the incident, but the very fact that it failed to condemn the security officers for this blatant and brutal assault on the women clearly indicated that any investigation would lack all credibility. There has been a series of similar incidents in state-run social care homes, which are also similar to incidents that have occurred in Saudi prisons, none of which has been investigated, at least in a way that brought about change or justice. Meanwhile, measures that are meant to protect victims of domestic violence are so feeble that in many instances the perpetrator is never brought to account.

The Khamis Mushait incident raised fresh questions about conditions and the quality of care that orphans, both girls and boys, receive in the Saudi social care system. It was all too reminiscent of what happened in 2020 to women like Loujain al-Hathloul and Samar Badawi, who were subjected to sexual harassment and other forms of torture while being held under arrest in secret detention centres. The authorities promised to investigate what had been done to them, but the inquiry they set up absolved officialdom of all responsibility.

Gender discrimination under the citizenship law

Under the Saudi nationality law, officially referred to as the Saudi Arabian Citizenship System, only in extremely rare circumstances can Saudi women pass on their nationality to their children. Children of Saudi men, on the other hand, acquire Saudi nationality automatically at birth. In early 2023, the authorities announced a minor technical amendment to Article 8 of the law, which transfers authority for granting citizenship to the children of Saudi mothers and non-Saudi fathers from the Minister of Interior to the Prime Minister. The almost impossible conditions have not changed.

11. Rights of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) People



In Saudi Arabia, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people continue to face discrimination and stigmatisation, and risk imprisonment or even execution for expressing their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Saudi Arabia has no written laws concerning LGBT people or their rights, but it criminalises all sexual relations outside marriage, whether same-sex or heterosexual. In the absence of codified laws, these matters are left to the discretion of judges, who often impose harsh rulings that can include imprisonment and even execution. Cross-dressing or being transgender can attract similar penalties.

No steps have been taken to recognise LGBT people as having basic rights such as freedom from discrimination, nor is there any indication that the authorities are willing to do so. The lack of LGBT rights in Saudi Arabia has been referred to several times by global celebrities invited to the kingdom.

12. Rights of the Stateless Bidoon



The large number of stateless persons in Saudi Arabia, known as "Bidoon" (meaning in Arabic "without", i.e. without nationality), continued to struggle and suffer hardship in every aspect of their lives as 2022 came to an end, including education, health, work and family life.

About the Bidoon

In the absence of official statistics, estimates put the number of Bidoon at anywhere between 70,000 and 250,000 individuals. They are mainly either descendants of nomadic tribes who failed to register for Saudi nationality when the nation state was being formed in the 1930s, or so-called *mawalid al-mamlaka* (born in the kingdom), generations of people born and raised in the country after their grandparents overstayed their residence permits, and who have no pathway to Saudi citizenship yet no ties to any other country. For both categories of Bidoon, Saudi Arabia is the only country they have ever known or lived in.

Whatever the reasons for their statelessness, the Bidoon today struggle and suffer hardship in every aspect of their lives. There are no clear or specific arrangements for their education, and while some manage with great difficulty to enrol in primary education, others are unable to do so – and higher education is completely out of reach. Stateless persons are not entitled to medical treatment either, and there have been cases where hospitals have turned them away, even in emergencies, because they do not have a Saudi ID card or passport. As a general rule, the Bidoon cannot work or earn an income, yet the government offers them no financial support. The authorities do not normally allow them to work in the public sector, but neither do they let them register private businesses or property, so sometimes the only way they can live is by doing menial jobs in the informal economy or with the help of charities.

Stateless persons' lack of documentation also heavily impacts their family lives and means that their marriages are not officially registered, even if the person they are marrying has citizenship, and they similarly struggle to obtain birth certificates for their children. Being deprived of both their civil and political rights and their economic, social and cultural rights, stateless persons in Saudi Arabia have an extremely hard existence and are often forced into a life of grinding poverty or crime. The numbers of Bidoon are growing, and with no serious or swift solutions in sight the situation is likely to become even worse.

Saudi Arabia has also not ratified either the Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons or the Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness.

13. Migrant Workers' Rights



Despite some limited reforms in recent years to Saudi Arabia's notorious *kafala* (sponsorship) system, it remained substantially intact in 2022, with migrant workers and domestic workers in particular continuing to suffer routine abuse.

Migrant workers in Saudi Arabia

Migrant workers make up roughly one-third of the population of Saudi Arabia, approximately 10 million out of an estimated 36 million people, according to the General Authority for Statistics. Of these, 75% come from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Egypt and the Philippines. They face multiple problems due to a number of complex and thorny regulations in the Labour Law and private sector regulations.

Kafala (sponsorship) system

Saudi Arabia's notorious *kafala* (sponsorship) system is an abusive recruitment framework that ties foreigners working in the kingdom to an individual resident who acts as his or her sponsor. This makes them vulnerable to exploitation, as it gives the employer excessive power over the employee, including in relation to their visa and residence status and ability to travel. In March 2021, the Saudi authorities introduced limited reforms to the kafala system, including allowing workers to apply for an exit permit to leave the country without obtaining their employer's (or sponsor's) consent. Yet the guidelines behind the initiative fail to address several important issues, and the system as a whole remains largely intact. One major flaw, for example, is that various categories of worker are not covered by the new reforms at all, including millions of domestic workers.

Domestic workers

Domestic workers are arguably the most vulnerable category of migrant worker in Saudi Arabia. They often find themselves being required to work around the clock seven days a week, having their passports confiscated, and being employed to do work outside their job description, sometimes involving sexual exploitation. There have been cases where housemaids were found working in several houses in rotation, with sponsors hiring out female workers by the hour for their own gain. The situation varies according to the worker's nationality and the protection they are able to get from their country's embassy.

During 2022, there were frequent reports of domestic workers in Saudi Arabia being subjected to various forms of physical, mental and sexual abuse by their employers, as well as frequent deaths in suspicious circumstances. The Saudi authorities rarely investigate such cases.

14. The War in Yemen



Despite a welcome UN-brokered truce that lasted from April until October, the warring parties in Yemen continued to commit grave violations, and the ongoing humanitarian crisis there remains one of the worst in the world. Meanwhile, Western governments continued to supply the Saudi-led coalition with military assistance and equipment, and in August 2022 the Biden administration approved a $3.05 billion sale of 300 US-made surface-to-air missiles to Saudi Arabia.

UN-brokered truce and ongoing violations on the ground

January-March 2022 saw an escalation in hostilities and an increase in the number of indiscriminate military air raids by the Saudi-led coalition killing scores of civilians, as well as the targeting of residential buildings and detention facilities.

On 1 April, the United Nations Special Envoy for Yemen, Hans Grundberg, announced that the UN had brokered a truce agreement between Houthi forces and the Saudi-led coalition, which came into effect on 2 April. The truce offered precious respite to civilians in Yemen, and was seen as an important first step towards building a lasting peace agreement; however it expired on 2 October with no peace in sight and has yet to be renewed at the time of publishing this report. Moreover, despite a reduction in military operations during the truce period, resulting in reduced casualties and displacement and facilitating increased movement across the country, many violations persisted on the ground, including ground and drone attacks and continuing risks from landmines and explosive remnants of war (ERW).

Ongoing humanitarian crisis

Eight years of conflict in Yemen have taken a terrible toll on the civilian population. Over 20 million people remain in need of humanitarian assistance, over half of them children, and over 16 million people are food insecure. These problems are compounded by increasing food and fuel prices, the economic crisis and natural disasters. Humanitarian access remains challenging, with warring parties frequently obstructing humanitarian aid and personnel.

Lack of UN war crimes probe

Given the scale of the ongoing violations, committed so far with impunity, the need of the victims of the Yemen conflict for accountability is more pressing than ever. In light of the disappointing ending in October 2021 of the mandate of the UN Group of Eminent Experts on Yemen, the only international mechanism to investigate human rights abuses in Yemen's conflict – and a toothless "capacity building" resolution adopted by the Human Rights Council without a vote in October 2022 – NGOs continue to call for alternative avenues by which to pursue justice, including for the UN to establish a criminal accountability mechanism.

Western governments continued to sell arms to the coalition

Saudi Arabia and its coalition allies meanwhile continued throughout 2022 to receive military assistance and equipment from Western governments. Numerous companies from the United States and Europe supplied coalition members with arms, components and spare parts, maintenance, training and support services. The United States is by far the biggest supplier of arms to Saudi Arabia, and in August 2022 the Biden administration approved a $3.05 billion sale of 300 surface-to-air missiles to Saudi Arabia. However, military supplies from Europe also constitute a substantial part of the overall resources available to coalition air forces. The United Kingdom, Germany, Spain, France and Italy account for the majority of arms delivered from Europe to members of the Saudi-led coalition.

15. International Developments Regarding Saudi Arabia



2022 saw the dangerous rehabilitation on the world stage of the kingdom's de facto ruler, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, who was granted meetings with a number of global leaders, including US President Joe Biden, as priorities shifted in light of Russia's war in Ukraine and the rise in energy prices. These developments make efforts to secure accountability more pressing than ever. Meanwhile, the Saudi authorities carried over into 2022 their previous intensive PR strategy of investing heavily in international sporting and music events, prompting calls for participating celebrities to speak out in support of human rights in the kingdom.

Diplomatic rehabilitation of Mohammed bin Salman

The alarming deterioration of the human rights situation in Saudi Arabia in 2022 coincided with the progressive diplomatic rehabilitation of Crown Prince and de facto ruler Mohammed bin Salman. The crown prince had been largely shunned on the international stage since the 2018 state-sponsored killing of Washington Post columnist Jamal Khashoggi. The growing trend of moving on from the Khashoggi scandal and overlooking Bin Salman's culpability was accelerated by the energy crisis caused by the Russian war in Ukraine, as Western politicians mended relations with the Saudi leadership in a bid for alternative energy from the Gulf.

In March, the UK's then-Prime Minister Boris Johnson visited Saudi Arabia in the most high-profile visit by a Western leader since French President Emmanuel Macron's tour of the Gulf region in December 2021. Then on 15-16 July, after months of deliberation, US President Joe Biden visited Saudi Arabia and met with the crown prince. NGOs called on the US administration to use this occasion to prioritise human rights concerns, but instead the trip

focused mainly on global oil supplies. This key visit laid bare the U-turn Biden had made on Saudi policy: as presidential candidate he had promised a more critical stance towards Riyadh. On 28 July, Mohammed bin Salman visited Paris and met with President Macron, only his second visit to a Western country since the 2018 Khashoggi killing, following a visit to Greece just days before.

As NGOs had warned, rather than securing tangible concessions over human rights these high-level visits appear to have directly emboldened the kingdom's leadership to commit further abuses. Johnson's visit coincided with the execution of 81 men on 12 March 2022, the largest mass execution in recent Saudi history. Meanwhile, during Biden's tour the Saudi diplomat and former Foreign Minister Adel al-Jubeir brazenly branded dissidents "terrorists" in a BBC interview. And the crown prince's diplomatic triumphs in July were swiftly followed in August by the beginning of a wave of unprecedently harsh jail sentences handed down in the Saudi courts.

Accountability efforts

In the face of this dangerous rehabilitation of the kingdom's de facto ruler, civil society actors persisted with several important measures to seek accountability over Khashoggi's murder. On 28 July, as Mohammed bin Salman visited France, Democracy for the Arab World Now (DAWN), Open Society Justice Initiative (OSJI) and TRIAL International filed a criminal complaint calling on the French authorities to open an investigation into the crown prince's role in the Khashoggi killing.

In another lawsuit, filed in the United States in 2020 by DAWN and Khashoggi's fiancée Hatice Cengiz over Bin Salman's role in the murder, the crown prince appeared towards the end of 2022 to have secured sovereign immunity from prosecution. On 27 September he was named Saudi prime minister, a post traditionally held by the king, in a move widely seen as nothing other than an attempt to shield himself from accountability. It seems to have succeeded: reflecting the shifting US stance towards the former pariah, in mid-November 2022 the Biden administration recommended to a US judge that Mohammed bin Salman be granted immunity in the lawsuit as a "sitting head of government".

Several lawsuits also remain pending in relation to Israeli technology firm NSO Group's Pegasus spyware, which has been used by repressive states including Saudi Arabia to hack the phones of many innocent people around the world. Two lawsuits are underway in the UK. One has been filed by lawyers Bindmans on behalf of ALQST founder Yahya Assiri and two other individuals against NSO Group, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Another has been filed by Leigh Day on behalf of Saudi activist Ghanem al-Dosari against Saudi Arabia, which on 19 August 2022 the UK High Court ruled could go ahead.

"Sportswashing"

The Saudi authorities persisted in 2022 with their intensive global PR offensive by continuing to invest heavily in sports and entertainment. In 2022 this included hosting the annual off-road Dakar Rally and the Spanish Super Cup in January and the F1 Grand Prix in March; the Saudi-backed LIV Golf series getting under way in June; a heavyweight boxing match in August; and the Diriyah Tennis Cup in December.

These events were often taken by NGOs as opportunities to call for participants, organisers and supporters to speak out on human rights abuses. Meanwhile, the first anniversary of football club Newcastle United's coming under Saudi ownership triggered calls in October for more stringent ownership rules in the English Premier League.

Also in October, an as-yet uncompleted area of the Neom site was surprisingly selected as the venue for the 2029 Asian Winter Games. This prestigious sporting event is normally held every four years, but has not taken place since 2017 due to difficulties in finding hosts. More significantly, according to Tourism Minister Ahmed bin Aqil al-Khateeb, Saudi Arabia is planning to make a joint bid to host the 2030 World Cup with Egypt and Greece.

16. Recommendations



Recommendations for the international community:

- Take action to ensure that an impartial, thorough, independent and effective criminal investigation is opened into the murder of Jamal Khashoggi, in which all perpetrators, including those at the head of the chain of command, are identified and prosecuted in a fair and transparent trial;
- Establish an immediate moratorium on all arms sales and exports of surveillance technology to Saudi Arabia;
- Consider the general human rights situation when engaging in business with the Saudi authorities, and assess the adverse human rights impact this might have;
- Introduce and endorse a UN resolution to establish a monitoring mechanism over the human rights situation in Saudi Arabia; and
- Urge the authorities in Saudi Arabia to implement the recommendations below.

Recommendations for the Saudi authorities:

- Ensure that the rights to freedom of expression, assembly and association are fully respected in law and practice and immediately and unconditionally release all prisoners of conscience who are being detained for exercising their fundamental freedoms, including those detained beyond completion of their prison sentences;

- Ratify the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights;

- Reform the country's legal system by promulgating a constitution and a criminal code, and by revising the Law on Combating Crimes of Terrorism and its Financing, the Anti-Cybercrime Law, the Law on Printing and Publication and the Law on Associations and Foundations to bring them into full conformity with international standards;

- Ensure that the four new laws announced on 8 February 2021 by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman to reform the country's judicial institutions comply with international standards;

- Put an end to the practice of arbitrary detention, and effectively afford individuals deprived of their liberty all fundamental legal safeguards and fair trial rights;
  Abolish the Specialised Criminal Court and refrain from subjecting peaceful dissidents to reprisals under the pretext of counterterrorism;

- Put an end to the practice of torture and ill-treatment, including prolonged periods of incommunicado detention and solitary confinement; and conduct prompt, effective and credible investigations into all allegations of torture, holding perpetrators accountable and providing victims with effective remedy in line with international standards;

- Immediately abolish the male guardianship system, repealing laws and ending practices that discriminate against women;

- Establish a moratorium on use of the death penalty with the aim of working towards its abolition; in the mean time, amend all existing legislation to limit application of the death penalty to only the most serious crimes and prohibit the execution of those convicted of offences carried out when minors;

- Put an end to all violations of international humanitarian and human rights law in Yemen, and ensure rapid and unimpeded delivery of humanitarian relief and essential goods;

- Put an end to the practice of enforced disappearance and ratify the UN Convention on the Protection of all Persons from Enforced Disappearance; Improve the management and oversight of prison facilities and ensure that the UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners are upheld in all places of detention;

- Abolish the kafala system and ratify the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families as well as ILO Convention No. 189 on Domestic Workers;

- Put an end to the practice of unlawful demolitions and forced displacement, conduct consultation with residents, and provide adequate prior notice and sufficient compensation for losses; and

- Facilitate the naturalisation of stateless individuals and ratify the 1954 Convention Relating to the Status of Stateless Persons as well as the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

17. Timeline of Human Rights-Related Events in Saudi Arabia in 2022

January
Othman Abdulaziz is arrested

Detained Uyghur Muslims Hemdullah Abduweli and Nurmemet Rozi are informed that they are at imminent risk of being forcibly returned to China

Early 2022
Lawyer and activist Mut'ib bin Zafir al-Amri is sentenced to seven years in prison

2 February
Dawoud al-Marhoun is released after serving a 10-year prison term, but remains under a 10-year travel ban

3 February
Journalist Fahad al-Suneidi is released from prison, approximately one year after his three-and-a-half-year sentence expired

3 February
Abdulrahman al-Dowaish is sentenced to two years in prison

3 February
Human rights activist Fahad al-Fahad is released, around one year after his five-year sentence expired; he is now under a 10-year travel ban

11 February
Naima al-Matrood is released after serving a six-year prison term, but remains subject to a six-year travel ban

2 March
The Criminal Court in Tabuk hands down a new death sentence against Abdullah al-Huwaiti for offences committed when he was a minor; the ruling is upheld by the Appeals Court on 13 June

11 March
Blogger Raif Badawi is released after serving a ten-year sentence, but remains under a ten-year travel ban

12 March
The Saudi authorities execute 81 men, the largest mass execution recorded in recent decades

31 March
Uyghur Muslims Abula Buheliqiemu and her 13-year-old daughter are detained and told that they will be deported

16 March
The UK's then-Prime Minister Boris Johnson visits Saudi Arabia and meets Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman

March
The authorities arbitrarily stop 85-year-old political prisoner Mohammed Saleh al-Khudari's hormone treatment for prostate cancer

7 April
A Turkish court issues a ruling to suspend the trial of 26 people accused over the killing of Jamal Khashoggi and transfer the case to Saudi Arabia

17-30 April
Human rights activist Essa al-Nukhaifi goes on hunger strike in Al-Ha'ir Prison in protest over vindictive delays in letting him out to complete vital banking transactions

7 April
The Supreme Court upholds death sentences against two young Bahrainis, Jaafar Sultan and Sadiq Thamer

April
Writer Mohammed al-Khowaildi is released after spending almost six years in prison, but remains under a travel ban

April
24-year-old Shaimaa al-Baqmi goes missing; it is suspected she has been arrested

15-19 May
Human rights activist Essa al-Nukhaifi stages another hunger strike in Al-Ha'ir Prison

15 May
Abdullah al-Duraibi is arrested and forcibly disappeared

23 May
Shadli al-Huwaiti goes on hunger strike in protest against ill-treatment and solitary confinement; he is force-fed through a tube in June

26 May
Mohammed al-Qahtani is beaten up by a man from a wing for prisoners with mental disorders, after the prison administration deliberately places prisoners of conscience there

Mid-2022
The Court of Appeal increases the prison sentence passed on human rights activist Israa al-Ghomgham from eight to 13 years

24 June
Murtaja Qureiris is released after serving an eight-year prison term, but continues to suffer an eight-year travel ban

15-16 July
US President Joe Biden visits Saudi Arabia and meets Mohammed bin Salman

23 July
Human rights activist and writer Nadhir al-Majed is released after serving a seven-year sentence, but remains subject to a seven-year travel ban

28 July
Democracy for the Arab World Now (DAWN), Open Society Justice Initiative (OSJI), and TRIAL International file a criminal complaint calling on the French authorities to investigate Mohammed bin Salman over the killing of Jamal Khashoggi

28 July
Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman visits Paris and meets with President Emmanuel Macron

July
Malik al-Dowaish, son of the preacher Sulaiman al-Dowaish, is arrested; he is released in September but re-arrested shortly afterwards

9 August
Women's rights activist and academic Salma al-Shehab is sentenced to 34 years in prison, to be followed by a travel ban of the same length

21 August
Egyptian doctor Sabry Shalaby is sentenced to 20 years in prison

9 August
Nourah Saeed al-Qahtani is sentenced to 45 years in prison, to be followed by a travel ban of the same length

23 August
Palestinian poet and artist Ashraf Fayadh is released almost one year after his eight-year jail sentence expired; he remains in Saudi Arabia

31 August
Video footage on social media shows Saudi security and police officers assaulting young women in the Social Education Home (orphanage) in Khamis Mushait, Asir Province

August
Abdulilah Rashid Ibrahim al-Huwaiti and Abdullah Dakhil Allah al-Huwaiti are each sentenced to 50 years in prison, to be followed by a travel ban of the same length

August
Writer, translator and computer programmer Osama Khaled is sentenced to 32 years in prison – increased on appeal from an initial five-year sentence

September
Tunisian nurse Mahdia Marzougui is sentenced to 15 years in prison

September
Blogger Dawood al-Ali is sentenced to 25 years in prison

27 September
Mohammed bin Salman is appointed prime minister, a post traditionally held by the king

September
Human rights activist Mohammed al-Rabiah goes on hunger strike in protest against his ongoing detention despite having recently completed his prison term

Late September
Human rights activist Mohammed al-Rabiah is sentenced to 17 years in prison

2 October
Three members of the Huwaitat tribe, Shadli, Ibrahim and Ataullah al-Huwaiti, are sentenced to death; the sentences are subsequently upheld on appeal

10 October
Ten Egyptian nationals belonging to Nubian civic associations in Saudi Arabia are sentenced to prison terms ranging from 10 to 18 years

3 October
Saudi-US citizen Saad Ibrahim al-Madhi is sentenced to 16 years and three months in prison, to be followed by a travel ban of the same length

14 October
Human rights defender Essa al-Nukheifi completes his six-year sentence; he is not released, but instead forcibly disappeared

October
The authorities prevent detained human rights defender Waleed Abu al-Khair from taking medication and visiting hospital

17 November
The Biden administration recommends to a US judge that Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman be granted sovereign immunity in a civil lawsuit over his role in the Khashoggi murder

November
Abdullah Jelan is sentenced to 10 years in prison, to be followed by a travel ban of the same length

10-23 November
The authorities execute 20 men for drug smuggling or trafficking

22 November
Human rights defender Mohammed al-Qahtani completes his ten year sentence; he is not released, but instead has been forcibly disappeared since 24 October

25 December
Journalist and writer Khaled al-Alkami is released after spending over five years in prison



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