



Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission Briefing

Panelist Biographies

Human Rights in Saudi Arabia: An Update

Panel I



Lina Al-Hathloul is the younger sister of Loujain Al-Hathloul, one of the drivers of change in the Saudi women's rights movement who has been imprisoned for more than two years. Since her older sister was detained in May 2018 alongside more than a dozen other women human rights defenders, Lina has become one of the few family members able and willing to speak out on behalf of an incarcerated relative. A lawyer by training, Lina is based in Brussels and therefore is more able to speak and travel freely. Many relatives of Saudi political prisoners are subject to travel bans themselves and/or are cowed by fear of retaliation by the present Saudi government. She has become a tireless advocate for her sister Loujain and has spoken to numerous media outlets, at international events and gatherings, and to representatives of the U.S. government and the United Nations.



Bethany AlHaidari is a PhD candidate in International Human Rights Law focused on Saudi Arabia and holds a Masters in Middle East & Islamic Studies. Bethany spent nearly a decade in Saudi Arabia conducting research on various human rights issues and reporting on Saudi for news outlets such as *Newsweek Daily Beast* and *AlMonitor*. In 2018, she was effectively trapped in Saudi Arabia with her daughter and later subject to extreme gender and religious discrimination in Saudi courts. After a harrowing escape from Saudi Arabia in December of 2019, Bethany returned home to Washington State and founded the Saudi American Justice Project. In partnership with Freedom Forward, Bethany began advocating and raising awareness about women and children trapped in situations of abuse in Saudi Arabia. Bethany also serves as the Saudi Research Fellow for the Freedom Initiative, working towards the release of individuals wrongfully detained in Saudi Arabia.



Safa Al Ahmad is the acting director of ALQST for Human Rights. She is an award-winning Saudi journalist and filmmaker who has directed documentaries for PBS and the BBC focusing on uprisings in the Middle East. Her film *Saudi's Secret Uprising* documented the historically unprecedented protests in the kingdom. Based on an investigation that took over a year, it was the first documentary to be jointly produced and simultaneously aired by BBC English, Arabic and Farsi. Her work on Yemen spans almost a decade and tracks the bloody trajectory of the conflicts within the country and their international impact.



Sarah Leah Whitson is the Executive Director of Democracy for the Arab World Now, DAWN. Previously she served as executive director of Human Rights Watch's Middle East and North Africa Division (2004-2020), overseeing the work of the division in 19 countries, with staff located in 10 countries. She has led dozens of advocacy and investigative missions throughout the region, focusing on issues of armed conflict, accountability, legal reform, migrant workers, and human rights. She has published widely on human rights and foreign policy in the Middle East in international and regional media, including *The New York Times*, *Foreign Policy*, *The Los Angeles Times*, and CNN.



Seth Binder is the Advocacy Officer at Project on Middle East Democracy, POMED. Previously, he served as program manager and research associate at the Center for International Policy's (CIP) Security Assistance Monitor program, where he focused on U.S. security assistance and arms sales policy. He has authored articles and publications on U.S. security assistance to Palestine, Yemen, and Tunisia and has been quoted in numerous outlets including TIME, Al-Jazeera, and *Foreign Policy*. He is the co-author of *Mohammed VI's Strategies for Moroccan Economic Development* (Routledge Press, 2020) and "The Moroccan Spring and King Mohammed VI's Economic Policy Agenda: Evaluating the First Dozen Years," a chapter in *The Birth of the Arab Citizen and the Changing of the Middle East*.

Moderator



Maran Turner is Executive Director of Freedom Now. Prior to joining Freedom Now, she was a lawyer with the Southern Africa Litigation Centre (SALC) in Johannesburg, South Africa from 2006 to 2007, where she managed a team of pro bono lawyers and worked with Southern African jurists on human rights litigation. Prior to her position with SALC, she was an associate with DLA Piper LLP (U.S.) where she was honored as Pro Bono Attorney of the Year for her international human rights work representing notable human rights defenders such as former Czech Republic President Václav Havel and Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Desmond Tutu.