

ALQST Advocating for Human Rights

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House Foreign Affairs Committee
Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission

Briefing
on
HUMAN RIGHTS IN SAUDI ARABIA

Tuesday, November 10, 2020 - 10:00am
Virtual briefing via Cisco WebEx

Statement of
SAFA AL AHMAD
ACTING DIRECTOR, ALQST FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

Saudi Arabia is a monarchy, a theocracy and a patriarchy.
This trifecta gives the authorities limitless power over our daily lives.
It may fluctuate from one king to the next in degree of interference,
but at its core, it has no internal checks and balances.

The rise of the crown prince Mohamed bin Salman and his ability to wipe out the competition -the other princes
who were thought to be the checks and balances-
is living proof of how brutal the state can be to everyone.
Even those who we once thought untouchable.

Mohamed bin Salman is now the state personified.

With him everything is personal.

Any criticism directed at him or his pet projects or policies are dealt with swiftly.

You can be disappeared, kidnapped, arrested, tortured
and in one horrifying case -that we know of- killed and dismembered.

But if you only follow the Saudi controlled media you would think the kingdom has been ushered into a 'new'
era where women are emancipated, Islam is moderate and everyone is free to pursue their best capitalist self.

This is Saudi gaslighting at it's finest.

The reality is Saudi society has never been so scared of its ruler.

Wave after wave of arrests and disappearances for perceived or imagined transgressions.
Sham trials for 'not praying enough for the ruler', 'owning unsanctioned books' or '**obstructing** the wheel of
progress'

We have unprecedented number of women and men fleeing the country seeking asylum.

Reports of the government trying to track them down, hacking and harassing them via the same digital platforms that were our tiny window of freedom of expression.

They even had the audacity to try to use INTERPOL to arrest some of them via red and amber alerts.

The case of Saad al-Jabri, a former intelligence officer close to then crown prince Mohamed bin Nayif is a perfect example of how the Saudi government is trying to use it's global influence. They even sent a kill team to Canada only weeks after Jamal was killed.

No lessons learned. No self reflection. Just impunity.

But perhaps one of the scariest developments in the kingdom is what they are doing in the darkness. In secret prisons.

Some in hotels, some in unidentified buildings and some in palaces.

ALQST has documented many of these cases.

Today, I'm able to share with you details of one such case.

Our sources took immense risk to tell us the fate of one of those disappeared since 2016.

Suliaman al-Dwaish, a man close to then crown prince Mohamed bin Nayif was kidnapped in broad daylight for the high crime of tweeting against Mohamed bin Salman then the deputy crown prince.

He was handcuffed, shackled and flown to Riyadh in the dead of night to Mohamed bin Salman's palace. He was interrogated and beaten by a high ranking Saudi official about his tweet.

The beating was so violent, others fearing he would die intervened after he was covered in blood.

The interrogator's white thobe turned red.

For the safety of our sources we are not revealing the name of the high ranking official.

But what we can reveal are details about the prison.

In the basement of the palace there are makeshift wooden cells, temporary offices and a clinic where prisoners are sometimes able to identify and talk to each other.

It is dedicated to rival members of the royal family, high ranking generals and others. There is perhaps around a150 prisoners in this one palace alone.

Our sources tell us the prison is personally run by two individuals who are now infamous: Saud al-Qahtani and Maher al-Mutreb.

Al-Qhatani was then a close confidant and advisor to the crown prince.

And yes, Maher al-Mutreb is one of the 15 member team who murdered Jamal Khashoggi.

They not only ran the prison but reportedly also participated directly in the torture.

We are also told that al-Qhatani joined interrogations remotely.

None of the Saudi authorities would admit to having al-Dwaish. They advised the family instead to go looking for him in hospitals, mental health institutions and morgues.

The last any of our sources had seen him was in late 2018 just before Jamal's murder.

Sadly, al-Dwaish's case is not unique.

Abdulrahman Al Sadhan was also kidnapped from the Red Crescent offices where he worked in Riyadh and disappeared on the 12th of March 2018.

He was also placed in a secret prison and tortured.

These secret prisons reportedly held both men and women, sometimes tortured in-front of each other, sexually harassed and intimidated and in one case a woman was told her children had died in a car accident to extract a confession in exchange for her to attend their funeral. She refused.

She had to live with that nightmare for a month before they finally told her the truth that they were still alive.

Abdulrahman's family did not hear his voice until nearly two years later, he was allowed a one minute phone call to a member of his family.

They have not heard from him since. No official charges have been brought against him either.

We are extremely worried about the safety and well being of all the prisoners. But especially this year.

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Dr. Abullah Al Hamid, one of the most prominent political prisoners in Saudi Arabia died in jail due to medical negligence in April.

Journalist Salah al-Shihi died of mysterious causes in July after being suddenly released from prison.

ALQST has documented over 40 journalists, writers and media workers currently in jail in Saudi Arabia.

But we are well aware that these numbers and stories are just the tip of the iceberg.

Saudi Arabia's hubris and impunity go well beyond its borders.

and their accomplices and enablers are many.

The Saudi authorities disregard for human rights at home is reflected in how its conducted itself in the war on Yemen on a more horrifying scale.

And their partner in crime is another country with its own abysmal record on human rights: the United Arab Emirates.

Together they have led a coalition into war on Yemen for 6 years. Causing the country to become the worst man made humanitarian disaster in the world

with no end in sight.

The United States is directly implicated in this war not only through selling arms to Saudi and the UAE, but also in its continuation of the so called war on terrorism that predates 9/11 in Yemen.

It is time to fundamentally re-evaluate this relationship.

To bring stability to the region for us, is to stop supporting our oppressors.

END