



General Assembly

Distr.: General
12 February 2018

English only

Human Rights Council

Thirty-seventh session

26 February-23 March 2018

Agenda item 4

Human rights situations that require the Council's attention

Written statement* submitted by Americans for Democracy and Human Rights in Bahrain, Inc., a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement, which is hereby circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[26 January 2018]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

GE.18-02113(E)



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Under the Guise of Countering Corruption, Saudi Arabia Suppresses Rights and Freedoms

Americans for Democracy & Human Rights in Bahrain (ADHRB) would like to take this opportunity at the 37th session of the United Nations Human Rights Council to discuss Saudi Arabia's anti-corruption campaign. We are concerned that Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman is using the campaign as a way to arrest rival princes and consolidate power, while holding those accused of corruption in extended pre-trial detention without due process protections. We are further concerned with the broader suppression of peaceful dissent and increased number of executions in the kingdom since bin Salman became Crown Prince in late June 2017.

I. Corruption Sweep

On 4 November, King Salman bin Abdulaziz ordered the formation of a committee chaired by the Crown Prince and charged with investigating corruption. The committee is empowered to "issue arrest warrants, travel bans, freeze [bank] accounts and [...] take whatever measures [it deems] necessary to deal with those involved in public corruption."¹

On 5 November 2017, the Crown Prince ordered the arrest of dozens of people, including former and current ministers, and princes. By 9 November, officials had detained and interrogated 208 people over alleged corruption, while suspending around 1,700 personal domestic bank accounts.² While Saudi Arabia's Attorney General estimated that "at least USD \$100 billion had been misused through systematic corruption and embezzlement over several decades," the Riyadh Chamber of Commerce and Industry estimated \$800 billion had been embezzled.³

While corruption in Saudi Arabia and among the royal family more specifically is something of an open secret, bin Salman has used the campaign as a way to consolidate power, and remove political rivals.

II. Consolidation of Power

For many years, the leadership of the kingdom's three security agencies – the regular military, the internal security services, and the Saudi Arabian National Guard (SANG) – had been "distributed among branches" of the Saudi royal family to ensure a balance of power.⁴

However, under the guise of tackling corruption, bin Salman ordered the arrest of Prince Mutaib bin Abdullah on corruption charges. Bin Abdullah was a favored son of King Abdullah and was once considered a contender for the throne.⁵ He was also the commander of the SANG. The SANG has 100,000 men and is considered almost a "parallel

1 "A Series of Anti-Graft Royal Orders Announced, related Committee led by Crown Prince Formed," Saudi Press Agency, 4 November 2017, <http://www.spa.gov.sa/viewstory.php?lang=en&newsid=1684252>.

2 Center for International Communication, "Statement by the Attorney General of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia," Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 9 November 2017, <https://cic.org.sa/2017/11/statement-by-the-attorney-general-of-the-kingdom-of-saudi-arabia-2/>; Stanley Carvalho and Tom Arnold, "Saudi graft inquiry spreads beyond borders as UAE examines bank accounts," Reuters, 9 November 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-saudi-arrests/saudi-graft-inquiry-spreads-beyond-borders-as-uae-examines-bank-accounts-idUSKBN1D91BL>.

3 Saeed Azhar and Joshua Franklin, "Saudi Arabia faces battle to repatriate assets after corruption crackdown," Reuters, 9 November 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-saudi-arrests-assets/saudi-arabia-faces-battle-to-repatriate-assets-after-corruption-crackdown-idUSKBN1D91LT>.

4 David D. Kirkpatrick, "Saudi Crown Prince's Mass Purge Upends a Longstanding System," *New York Times*, 5 November 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/11/05/world/middleeast/saudi-crown-prince-purge.html>.

5 Katie Paul, "Saudi prince, relieved from National Guard, once seen as throne contender," Reuters, 4 November 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-saudi-government-defence-newsmaker/saudi-prince-relieved-from-national-guard-once-seen-as-throne-contender-idUSKBN1D40VG>.

army,” while holding considerable influence among the kingdom’s tribes.⁶ In his place, King Salman appointed the young and inexperienced Prince Khalid bin Ayyaf Al Muqrin, about who little is known.

This move builds on previous royal decisions. In early 2015, King Salman named bin Salman Minister of Defense, granting him influence over military policy. In June 2017, the King removed Mohammed bin Nayef from his position as the powerful Minister of Interior, replacing him with someone younger and less experienced. In July 2017, King Salman signed a decree transferring security and intelligence responsibilities away from the Ministry of Interior to the newly created Presidency for State Security overseen directly by the King, significantly reducing the Ministry of Interior’s power.⁷

These moves eroded the balance of power established by distributing the security service portfolios to different familial branches, while serving to consolidate the King and the Crown Prince’s control and influence over the security services.

III. Human Rights Concerns

There have also been concerns of torture. While some of those detained have been held under house arrest in Riyadh’s luxurious Ritz-Carlton, officials have allegedly tortured other detainees. According to Middle East Eye, during their detention, “some senior figures were beaten and tortured so badly during their arrest or subsequent interrogations that they required hospital treatment.”⁸

There have also been concerns surrounding the lack of due process, as many detainees have not been officially charged with committing any crime, nor have they been brought before a judge. Instead, they have been held for several months without any formal charges, but only on suspicion of “corruption,” which has yet to be delineated, as the Attorney General has not enumerated specific charges. However, some detainees have secured their release by paying a fee – sometimes up to USD 1 billion. According to Adam Coogle of Human Rights Watch, “this appears to be taking outside of anything that resembles a clear legal process. If the Saudi authorities don’t offer a chance for legal defense, then this is nothing other than a shakedown.”⁹

This swift detention of scores of individuals without due process protections is similar to the arrests in September 2017 of dozens of peaceful dissidents by bin Salman. In September 2017, authorities arrested at least 16 people deemed to be critical of bin Salman. The detainees had advocated for mild political reforms. Among them are prominent religious figures, writers, journalists, academics, and activists Abdulaziz al-Shubaily and Issa al-Hamid – founding members of the Saudi Civil and Political Rights Association (ACPRA), a human rights organization.¹⁰ In early October, officials arrested 22 individuals on charges of “inciting against public order” on social media, and then detained another 24 people for “promoting lies and exaggerations on social media.”¹¹

6 Katie Paul and Stephen Kalin, “Saudi mass arrests jolt markets but many see overdue swoop on corruption,” Reuters, 7 November 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-saudi-arrests/saudi-mass-arrests-jolt-markets-but-many-see-overdue-swoop-on-corruption-idUSKBN1D71NN>; “Mapping the Saudi State Chapter 5: The National Guard,” Americans for Democracy & Human Rights in Bahrain, 3 August 2015, <http://www.adhrb.org/2015/08/mapping-the-saudi-state-chapter-5-the-national-guard/>.

7 “Presidency of State Security: A vision for development and prosperity,” Saudi Gazette, available at <http://saudigazette.com.sa/article/513537/SAUDI-ARABIA/State-Security>.

8 David Hearst, “EXCLUSIVE: Senior Saudi figures tortured and beaten in purge,” Middle East Eye, 9 November 2017, <http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/exclusive-senior-figures-tortured-and-beaten-saudi-purge-1489501498>.

9 Ben Hubbard and David D. Kirkpatrick, “Saudi Arabia Squeezes Detainees as It Tries to Seize Assets,” *New York Times*, 20 November 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/11/20/world/middleeast/saudi-arabia-corruption.html>.

10 “At Least 16 More Arrests in Saudi Arabia Amid Succession and Qatar Crisis,” Americans for Democracy & Human Rights in Bahrain, 28 September 2017, <https://www.adhrb.org/2017/09/at-least-16-more-arrests-in-saudi-arabia-amid-succession-and-qatar-crisis/>.

11 “Saudi Arabia arrests 22 for spreading online videos,” AlJazeera, 5 October 2017, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/10/saudi-arabia-arrests-22-spreading-online-videos-171005084136674.html>.

In addition to overseeing a widespread program of suppression of free expression, Mohammed bin Salman has also overseen a dramatic increase in the number of executions. Throughout 2017, Saudi Arabia executed 143 people. From the beginning of 2017 to 21 June, the kingdom executed 39 people. However, since bin Salman became Crown Prince in late June, the kingdom has executed over 100 more people. Among them were four peaceful protesters who were sentenced after they were tortured into confessed to committing spurious terror crimes. In addition, in late July, the Court of Appeal upheld the death sentences of 15 men, who were convicted of spying for the Islamic Republic of Iran, but whose trials were severely marred by unfair trials, ridiculous charges, and torture-induced confessions.¹² In addition to the 15 men, there are 17 other individuals on death row for peaceful expression- and assembly-related crimes. Among them are seven minors, including Ali al-Nimr, Dawood al-Marhoon, Mujtaba al-Suwaiket, Salman al-Quraish, Abdullah al-Sareeh, Abdulkareem al-Hawaj, and Abdullah al-Zaher. They are at risk of impending execution, with several having exhausted their legal appeals.

IV. Conclusion

While Saudi Arabia faces significant problems concerning corruption, Mohammed bin Salman Al Saud's anti-corruption drive has raised serious concerns about the centralization of power and the silencing of peaceful dissidents and opponents. In the course of the sweep, the Crown Prince have consolidated his control over the kingdom's three main security services and extended his personal power through the office of the King. More broadly, under the oversight of bin Salman, the kingdom has seen a dramatic increase in executions and death sentences related to peaceful dissident political activity.

V. Recommendations

ADHRB calls on the Government of Saudi Arabia to:

- End the arbitrary detentions of those detained and either immediately and unconditionally release them without bail, or immediately bring substantiated charges against in line with international law-enforcement standards;
- Hold any trials in a transparent manner and in a court that respects due process and internationally-recognized standards of fair trials;
- Immediately empower an independent and impartial committee to investigate allegations of torture against detainees and prosecute and hold accountable any officials responsible for abuse and torture;
- Immediately release all prisoners of conscience and drop all charges against them;
- Immediately establish a moratorium on the use of the death penalty with the aim of abolishing capital punishment.

¹² "Saudi Arabia: Death sentence upheld on appeal for 15 men," Amnesty International, 24 July 2017, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde23/6786/2017/en/>.