



**Gulf Centre for Human Rights (GCHR)
Briefing Paper**

**The Vision 2030 Saudi Arabia Reform Plan: Women
Human Rights Defenders in Saudi Arabia cease to exist**

September 2018

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I. Introduction

Women in Saudi Arabia have been for a long time suffering in silence under the patriarchal society and male-dominated decision-making authoritarianism on all levels. The Gulf Centre for Human Rights (GCHR) has been documenting and highlighting cases of women activists and women human rights defenders (WHRDs) since 2011. Thirty out of 100 of the WHRDs' cases recorded by GCHR from the wider Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region were of Saudi WHRDs, making Saudi Arabia one of the top Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries targeting women rights activists and defenders, according to our reports. Yet, it is believed that many cases have gone undocumented due to the closed civic space and the multi-layered patriarchal system that normalised the inequality and made gender-based discrimination permissible. Women who dared to defy the norms, and stand up for their rights are often subjected to various types of threats and targeting not only for their human rights activities but because of their fundamental identities as women.

Saudi Arabia is the fifth country on top of the list of [the world's most dangerous country for women](#)¹. The evidence-based survey's results review six key areas including health care, discrimination, culture traditions, sexual violence, and non-sexual violence, as well as human trafficking. The survey results conclude discrimination is the main pressing issue facing women in Saudi Arabia, where thematically Saudi Arabia was ranked second after Afghanistan in discriminating against women. "This includes job discrimination; an inability to make a livelihood, property or inheritance rights; a lack of access to education and to adequate nutrition." Consequently, the World Economic Forum's 2017 Global Gender Gap report ranked Saudi Arabia 138 out of 144 countries for its wide gender gap - the Kingdom has even scored lower in Political participation and opportunities coming in the 140th position on the global chart.²

The guardianship system is one of the main discriminatory tools used in Saudi Arabia to box in women within the legal framework of system of male superiority and decision-making on women's behalf. The simple decisions of traveling, studying and accessing healthcare as well as marrying are bound by the approval of the male guardian. "Women regularly face difficulty conducting a range of transactions without a male relative, from renting an apartment to filing legal claims," according to a Human Rights Watch [report](#).³ This authoritarian system is just a sample of bigger authoritarian policies embodied in the government's tactics to target women's rights activists and defenders.

Despite promises of reform made in the ambitious Vision 2030⁴ plan, which has a stated ambition for Saudi Arabia to be "the heart of the Arab and Islamic worlds, the investment powerhouse, and the hub connecting three continents." The decision to allow women to drive was not based on justice but on economics, hence the warnings sent to WHRDs and activists to keep quiet about women's rights and just celebrate the granting of the right to drive.

¹ Thomson Reuters Foundation (2018). The world's most dangerous countries for women.. See: <http://poll2018.trust.org>

² World Economic Forum (2017). The Global Gender Gap Report 2017. See: http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2017.pdf

³Human Rights Watch (2016). Boxed In Women and Saudi Arabia's Male Guardianship System. See: <https://www.hrw.org/report/2016/07/16/boxed/women-and-saudi-arabias-male-guardianship-system>

⁴See Vision 2030 official website at <http://vision2030.gov.sa/en>

GCHR has repeatedly raised the alarmed about the situation of HRDs in Saudi Arabia, and in particular WHRDs, who are alone fighting a long-standing battle with no back-up or support. The lack of support for detained WHRDs in Saudi Arabia will not only affect the activists' spaces but also all women's spaces and their rights situation in general in the kingdom. Therefore, GCHR will continue to raise the situation of detained Saudi WHRDs as one of the main concerns and an epidemic plight in the region.

II. WHRDs' Spaces in Saudi Arabia

1. UN spaces and engagement with international mechanisms:

The international community through its mechanisms relies on the support of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs). Where spaces are closed and often the truth is blacked-out, CSOs, activists, and HRDs provide the real voices of the victims of violations. Through their reports, governments can go under reviews, assessments, and trials to hold these governments accountable for their actions and breaches of their commitments. However, governments with a long legacy of human rights violations and atrocities tend to initiate a backlash against any attempt to reveal the truth and unmask its reality.

In Saudi Arabia, engagement with the United Nations (UN) mechanisms is considered a crime, as diplomacy takes an authoritarian form even on a higher level. GCHR has documented cases of WHRDs' persecution in relation to their activities with UN mechanisms or bodies.

For instance, after speaking at the 27th session of the Human Rights Council (HRC) in Geneva on human rights in Saudi Arabia, WHRD **Samar Badawi** was banned from traveling in December 2014. The travel ban was issued by the Ministry of Interior for an indefinite time period⁵. [Loujain Al-Hathloul](#), a well-known women's rights defender on social media, was arrested on 15 May 2018 during the recent crackdown against WHRDs in Saudi Arabia. Shortly after, a Saudi source close to Al-Hathloul confirmed that her detention is an act of reprisal for her engagement with international human rights mechanisms, including UN human rights bodies.⁶ This reprisal is believed to be related to the accusations made public by the official Saudi Press Agency (SPA) acknowledging the arrest of seven of the HRDs and accusing them of treason and conspiracy against the country based on "suspicious communication with foreign entities."

Therefore, it is believed that targeting WHRDs is an act ultimately of fear that WHRDs would break through the norms and set new role models for other Saudi women to encourage them to challenge the status quo. The Saudi government faces such involvement with UN and international mechanisms with aggressive types of reprisals to set out its standards clearly and consolidate its approach of inflicting punishment on those with dissenting opinions.

On the other hand, Saudi Arabia's ambition continues to be to seek more positions related to human rights and to women's rights internationally, such as being elected and re-elected to the

⁵ GCHR (2014). Saudi Arabia: Human rights defender Samar Badawi banned from travel prior to EU meeting. See: <https://www.gc4hr.org/news/view/838>

⁶ GCHR (2018). Crackdown on Saudi women human rights defenders sets off alarms. See: <https://www.gc4hr.org/news/view/1880>

UN HRC⁷, then elected by secret ballot to four-year terms for the UN Commission on Status of Women (CSW), beginning at the first meeting of the sixty-third session in 2018 and expiring at the close of the sixty-sixth session in 2022. Saudi Arabia was also elected to the Executive Board of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)/United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)/United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) to serve three-year terms beginning on 1 January 2018.⁸ As reported, these elections to various UN bodies come in the form of encouragement by other states to help the country to take steps forward towards enhancing women's situation in the country, which conversely seems to be deteriorating rapidly, despite the ban on driving being lifted and some guardianship rules being relaxed.

2. Restrictions on civic space by curbing freedom of assembly and association:

In 2016, Saudi Arabia decreed a new law on Associations and Foundations of NGOs⁹ which came into effect in March 2016. The law sets the legal framework for organisations and associations to be established. It was set to guarantee "citizen participation in the running and development of society," allowing the first-ever creation, management and supervision of organisations by civil society.

- A report by FIDH, GCHR and AL-QST to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)¹⁰ in March 2018 criticised the text of this law for having "many vague provisions, however, enabling restrictions to be placed on registering organisations." Also, the law forbids any organisation from its "right to exercise any activity while it has not completed all the procedures" for its creation, according to (Article 8, paragraph 4). On the other hand, while the law sets an enormous list of areas of work for these organisations, the lengthy list hasn't included the legal, political and - most importantly - any human rights spheres. Therefore, women's human rights work through registered institutions can never be legalised by the law. The law has also obliged the organisations to follow and respect Shariaa law, which imposes more restrictions on women's rights according to the Saudi law.

This law's ambiguity gives a wider space for interpretation which allows judges to take decisions based on their interpretations of this law. So authoritarianism is clearly at the centre

⁷ Human Rights Watch (2016). How Saudi Arabia Kept its UN Human Rights Council Seat. See: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/11/01/how-saudi-arabia-kept-its-un-human-rights-council-seat>

⁸ ECOSOC/6824 (2017) Economic and Social Council 2017 SESSION, 18TH & 19TH Meetings. Launching 2017 Coordination Segment, Economic and Social Council Adopts 10 Decisions, Elects Subsidiary Body Members amid Debate on NGO Participation. See: <https://www.un.org/press/en/2017/ecosoc6824.doc.htm>

⁹ Law on Associations and Foundations, adopted by Royal Decree No. M/8, 19.2.1437H of December 1, 2015. In Arabic, '*Nidham al-jam'iyat wa al-muassassat al-ahliya*'. See:

<https://boe.gov.sa/ViewSystemDetails.aspx?lang=ar&VersionID=353&SystemID=374> ; alternative link (in Arabic):

<https://sd.mlsd.gov.sa/ar/%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%b3%d9%8a%d8%a7%d8%b3%d8%a7%d8%aa-%d9%88-%d8%a7%d9%84%d9%84%d9%88%d8%a7%d8%a6%d8%ad/%d9%86%d8%b8%d8%a7%d9%85-%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%ac%d9%85%d8%b9%d9%8a%d8%a7%d8%aa-%d9%88%d8%a7%d9%84%d9%85%d8%a4%d8%b3%d8%b3%d8%a7%d8%aa-%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%a3%d9%87%d9%84%d9%8a%d8%a9>

¹⁰ CEDAW (2018). International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), the Gulf Centre for Human Rights (GCHR) and AL-QST joint submission for CEDAW 69 Session. See:

https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CEDAW/Shared%20Documents/SAU/INT_CEDAW_NGO_SAU_30027_E.pdf

of this law, that not only excluded human rights work through official chains within the country, but also criminalised any attempt to work from outside these restricted legal NGOs.

During the last Universal Periodic Review (UPR) cycle, the Kingdom has accepted recommendations related to enhance the freedom of assembly and the involvement in human rights issues and work independently on forming and registering related NGOs, such as “Enhance legislative reforms amongst others by taking measures to ensure in the short term, as well as legally and in practice, the registration of fully independent human rights NGOs.”¹¹ But the Kingdom has not implemented or has taken measures towards any enhancement.

3. Alternative online spaces for activism:

Women in Saudi Arabia have often taken other spaces and strived to make their voices heard within an extremely closed space, and due to their inability to form or register any human rights organisations, campaigning has stormed digital space and their voices were echoed widely. Such as the launch in 2017 of the campaign to end the male guardianship system of women, [#IAmMyOwnGuardian](#). The campaign received widespread support across the country, and thousands of social media users joined. Women activists submitted thousands of letters to the King of Saudi Arabia to end the country’s guardianship system.¹² Another petition to the King to end guardianship was signed by 15,000 people (men and women). The current unprecedented round-up of WHRDs started in January 2018 with the arrest of two WHRDs, **Noha Al-Balawi** and **Maria Naji**, as part of a pattern of repression of HRDs that has escalated over the past years. The arrests were related to their online activism in support of social media campaigns such as (#Right2Drive) or against the guardianship system (#IAmMyOwnGuardian). On 10 November 2017, the Specialised Criminal Court (SCC) in Riyadh sentenced WHRD **Naimah Al-Matrod**¹³ to six years in jail. The SCC was created in 2008 to deal with terrorism cases but instead has been misused to target HRDs and other activists.¹⁴

The wave of arrests continued after the March session of the UN HRC, when Loujain Al-Hathloul, was arrested on 15 May; followed by the arrest of Dr. **Eman Al-Nafjan**, founder and author of the [Saudiwoman's Weblog](#), who had previously protested the driving ban; and **Aziza Al-Yousef**, a prominent campaigner for women’s rights. Four other women’s human rights defenders (WHRDs) who were arrested in May 2018 were released, including Dr. **Aisha Al-Manae**, Dr. **Hessa Al-Sheikh** and Dr. **Madeha Al-Ajroush**, who had taken part in the first women’s protest movement demanding the right to drive in 1990. At the time, 47 women had been arrested for driving and had lost their passports and their jobs.

The arrests and subsequent release in May 2018 also included **Walaa Al-Shubbar**, a young activist well-known for her campaigning against the guardianship system. They are all academics and professionals who supported women’s rights and provided assistance to

¹¹ CIVICUS, European Saudi Organisation for Human Rights (ESOHR) and Americans for Democracy & Human Rights in Bahrain (ADHRB) (2018). Kingdom of Saudi Arabia Joint Submission to the UN Universal Periodic Review 31st Session of the UPR Working Group. See:

http://www.civicus.org/images/CIVICUS_ESOHR_ADHRB_Joint_UPR_Saudi_Arabia_UPR_3rd_Cycle.pdf

¹² GCHR (2017). Saudi Arabia: Gulf Centre for Human Rights supports campaign to end male guardianship system of women. See: <https://www.gc4hr.org/news/view/1501>

¹³ GCHR (2017). Saudi Arabia: Internet activist Naimah Al-Matrod sentenced to six years in prison. See: <https://www.gc4hr.org/news/view/1731>

¹⁴ GCHR (2018). Saudi Arabia: Women’s rights defenders arrested for promoting human rights online. See: <https://www.gc4hr.org/news/view/1783>

survivors of gender-based violence. Although the four WHRDs were released, they are believed to be still facing charges.

Then on 06 June 2018, journalist and woman human rights defender **Nouf Abdulaziz** was arrested¹⁵ after a raid on her home, and was taken to an unknown location where she was held incommunicado. Abdulaziz writes for many publications and was a newspaper editor and a television producer. Her twitter profile shows three of the women already arrested in May 2018 - Al-Hathloul, Al-Nafjan, and Al-Yousef. Following Abdulaziz's arrest, **Mayya Al-Zahrani** published a letter from Abdulaziz, who prepared something for publication in case she was arrested. Al-Zahrani was then arrested herself on 09 June 2018, for publishing the letter.¹⁶

On 27 June 2018, WHRD **Hatoon Al-Fassi**, a renowned scholar, associate professor of women's history at King Saud University, was arrested. She has long been advocating for the right of women to participate in municipal elections and to drive, and was one of the first women to drive the day the ban was lifted on 24 June 2018.

Twice in June, the UN called on¹⁷ Saudi Arabia to urgently release all those recently arrested nationwide. On 27 June 2018, nine United Nations experts said, "In stark contrast with this celebrated moment of liberation for Saudi women, women's human rights defenders have been arrested and detained on a wide scale across the country, which is truly worrying and perhaps a better indication of the Government's approach to women's human rights." They emphasised that women HRDs "face compounded stigma, not only because of their work as human rights defenders, but also because of discrimination on gender grounds."

The arrests by State Security continued with **Samar Badawi** and **Nassima Al-Sadah**¹⁸ on 30 July 2018. They are being held in solitary confinement in a prison that is controlled by the State Security Presidency, which is a new apparatus established by order of King Abdullah on 20 July 2017 and includes all the security forces. They have not been given proper access to their families nor allowed to talk to their lawyers.

Amal Al-Harbi, the wife of prominent activist **Fowzan Al-Harbi**, was also arrested by State Security on 30 July 2018 while at the seaside with her children in Jeddah and taken to an unknown location. Her husband is one of the founding members of the Saudi Civil and Political Rights Association (ACPRA), who is serving a ten-year prison sentence after being arrested on 26 December 2013.

Now, **Israa Al-Ghomgam**¹⁹ is facing execution, causing an international uproar after her trial began in August 2018. On 06 December 2015, the security forces raided the house of Al-Ghomgam and her husband, activist **Mousa Al-Hashim** and arrested them. The two

¹⁵ GCHR (2018). Saudi Arabia: Two more women human rights defenders arrested, as campaign continues against vocal supporters of women's rights. See: <https://www.gc4hr.org/news/view/1883>

¹⁶ See Nouf Abdelaziz's full letter in English and Arabic: <http://hanaalkhamri.blogspot.com/2018/06/read-letter-from-recently-arrested.html>

¹⁷ UN OHCHR (2018). Saudi Arabia must immediately free women human rights defenders held in crackdown, say UN experts. See: <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=23270&LangID=E>

¹⁸ GCHR (2018). Saudi Arabia: Arrest of women human rights defenders Samar Badawi and Nassima Al-Sadah. See: <https://www.gc4hr.org/news/view/1920>

¹⁹ GCHR (2018). Saudi Arabia: Woman human rights defender Israa Al-Ghomgam could face death sentence while Samar Badawi and Nassima Al-Sadah remain detained incommunicado. See: <https://www.gc4hr.org/news/view/1934>

participated in peaceful protests in Al-Qatif that took place as demonstrations spread across the Middle East during the so-called Arab Spring beginning in 2011. On 06 August 2018, at the first hearing of Al-Ghomgam's trial, the Public Prosecution presented a list of eight main charges against her, including charges under Article 6 of the Cybercrime Act of 2007 related to activity on social networking sites. The prosecution asked the court to sentence her to death by beheading and the SCC postponed the hearing to 28 October 2018.

The repressive laws that violate freedom of expression, association and assembly are countless in Saudi Arabia. The laws not only violate basic human rights, but also continue to be used against WHRDs as a sort of punishment for their human rights work. For instance, the Kingdom's Anti-Cyber Crime Law (Royal Decree No. M/17 dated 26 March 2007) allows "offenders" to be publicly named and shamed.²⁰ Saudi Arabia's public prosecution announced in early September 2018 that "Producing and distributing content that ridicules, mocks, provokes and disrupts public order, religious values and public morals through social media ... will be considered a cybercrime punishable by a maximum of five years in prison and a fine of three million riyals" (USD\$800,000). This is significant because Saudi Arabia has the largest number of active Twitter users who generate the largest number of tweets in the MENA region, according to the 2017 Arab Social Media Report²¹. In 2016, there were over 6.3 million Saudi Twitter users, and more than 40% were women.

The use of the Anti-Cyber Crime Law was apparent shortly after the wave of arrest of W/HRDs, when official and semi-official media outlets started naming and shaming detained W/HRDs on their front pages and social media accounts calling them "traitors" and "agents of embassies" (#عملاء_السفارات). It is believed that the SPA statement refers directly to the HRDs named by Saudi media outlets. So not only public naming and shaming has long been a tool for pressure groups and activists according to this law in Saudi Arabia, but also activism has a high price to pay according to the new Act.

In addition, women face online threats and harassment. According to well-known Twitter influencer and WHRD **Manal Al-Sharif**, many twitter users remain anonymous when pressing for gender equality in order to protect themselves from harassment or arrest. But she was not able to stay anonymous. In the *New York Times*, in September 2018, she wrote: "Trolling and using fake accounts on Twitter are not new tactics. They have even been used against me on a personal level. Attacks on me have ranged from pro-government and fundamentalist groups spreading fake news and rumors about me (I was once reported killed in a car accident, which made international headlines) to the vicious smearing of the #Women2Drive campaign, a right-to-drive movement for women in Saudi Arabia that I co-founded in 2011. Despite the offending accounts being reported countless times, Twitter took no action."²²

III. Conclusion

²⁰ Norton Rose Fulbright (2015). Saudi Arabia updates cybercrime law to include "naming and shaming" penalty. See: <https://www.dataprotectionreport.com/2015/06/saudi-arabia-updates-cybercrime-law-to-include-naming-and-shaming-penalty/>

²¹ Arab Social Media Report (2017). The Internet of Things. See: <http://www.mbrsg.ae/getattachment/1383b88a-6eb9-476a-bae4-61903688099b/Arab-Social-Media-Report-2017>

²² Manal Al-Sharif, *New York Times* (2018). The Dangers of Digital Activism. See: <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/09/16/opinion/politics/the-dangers-of-digital-activism.html>

In 2018, GCHR has issued several reports and UN submissions on Saudi Arabia, more than any other country in the region - not to mention a dozen appeals and updates, covering the largest ratio of WHRDs' cases. An astounding 30% of the entire cases of WHRDs in 2018 have been about Saudi WHRDs out of all those received and documented by GCHR from the entire region. This highlights the seriousness of the plight of WHRDs in the Kingdom, who remain active despite the backlash, the restrictions and the closing of civic spaces, as well as the gender-specific targeting and discrimination against WHRDs for their human rights activities and their fundamental identity as women.

It is obvious that Saudi Arabia is somewhat immune to criticism about the status of women's rights and human rights in general in the country, and the international community has enabled the Saudi authorities' belief that they can get away with violations - from jailing women's rights activists to imposing the death penalty for protesting. Not only this, but Saudi was rewarded internationally by being elected to high-level women related positions at UN commissions and councils for taking baby steps towards enhancing women's rights.

Saudi Arabia became a Human Rights Council member in 2006 and was elected to the Council for the fifth time in 2016; as such, Saudi Arabia is expected to cooperate fully with international human rights systems. Yet, according to a joint report by GCHR, the International Service for Human Rights, Americans for Democracy & Human Rights in Bahrain, and the Observatory, "Saudi Arabia has not issued a standing invitation to special procedures mandate holders; has replied to less than half of communications received by special procedures and has completed 4 of 14 visit requests. The longest outstanding visit request is from the special rapporteur on freedom of expression, issued 2004. In February 2015, Saudi Arabia accepted the visit request of the Special Rapporteur on HRDs; the visit is yet to take place."²³

The UN must take action and remove Saudi Arabia from UN human rights bodies, including suspending Saudi Arabia from the UN HRC pursuant to Resolution 60/251, Article 8, as recommended in a written submission to the 39th session of the UN HRC made by Lawyer's Rights Watch Canada, and supported by GCHR.²⁴

The recent crackdown on WHRDs in Saudi Arabia has proved that the country is not taking the reform approach - on the contrary it is going in the opposite direction, where the rulers of the conservative system are still unable and unwilling to make the promised changes.

It is apparent that years of the patriarchal guardianship system that was built over decades by legitimising women's human rights violations and gender-based discrimination wouldn't be changed overnight, even with a radically ambitious plan aimed at throwing dust in the eyes of the international community to partially blind it from the systematic targeting of the human rights community in Saudi Arabia.

²³ ISHR, GCHR, ADHRB and the Observatory (2018). UPR Briefing Paper on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders in Saudi Arabia. See:

https://www.ishr.ch/sites/default/files/documents/final_saudi_arabia_upr_omct_logo.pdf

²⁴ Lawyer's Rights Watch Canada and GCHR (2018). Saudi Arabia: Persistent gross, widespread and systematic violations of human rights while a member of the UN Human Rights Council - Joint Written Statement to the 39th Session of the UN Human Rights Council. See: <https://www.lrwc.org/saudi-arabia-persistent-gross-widespread-and-systematic-violations-of-human-rights-while-a-member-of-the-un-human-rights-council/>

After Canada publicly protested the arrests of Samar Badawi and Nassima Al-Sadah on 30 July 2018, a serious diplomatic row between Saudi Arabia and Canada ensued. Badawi's sister-in-law **Ensaf Haider**, who lives in Canada, is married to **Raif Badawi**, currently serving a ten-year prison sentence in Saudi Arabia; and the case has received a lot of attention in Canada.²⁵ Saudi Arabia retaliated by imposing trade sanctions and withdrawing medical students and patients from Canada, proving that it does in fact expect allies to refrain from publicly criticising the Kingdom. Other countries must follow suit, and companies doing business in Saudi Arabia might also reconsider providing arms, or even cars to the Kingdom.

IV. Recommendations

GCHR reiterates recommendations from previous reports and the joint submission to CEDAW as follows:

In general, we call upon the Saudi Authorities to:

1. Immediately repeal the sentences against all women and men human rights defenders and drop all charges against them;
2. Immediately release all women and men human rights defenders and prisoners of conscience in Saudi Arabia whose arrests concern only peaceful and legitimate action in the promotion and protection of human rights;
3. Immediately release all women prisoners who are being detained in violation of their right to freedom of expression, particularly those resisting the guardianship system;
4. Allow all citizens to express themselves freely in relation to the rights of women, including public discussion of campaigns designed to gain freedom from the guardianship system; or discuss the legitimate civil and political rights of the people; and
5. Ensure in all circumstances the ability of human rights defenders and Internet activists in Saudi Arabia to carry out their legitimate human rights work without fear of retaliation and without any restrictions, including judicial harassment.

More specifically, we encourage the Saudi authorities to:

1. End the repression of women human rights defenders and in particular:
 - Under all circumstances, guarantee the physical and psychological integrity of detained human rights defenders and all human rights defenders in Saudi Arabia;
 - Immediately and unconditionally release all detained human rights defenders, given that their detention is aimed at punishing legitimate human rights activities;
 - Guarantee the right to a fair trial for all human rights defenders by removing obstacles to access to their lawyers;

²⁵ GCHR (2018). Saudi Arabia: Woman human rights defender Israa Al-Ghomgam could face death sentence while Samar Badawi and Nassima Al-Sadah remain detained incommunicado. See: <https://www.gc4hr.org/news/view/1934>

- End all forms of judicial harassment against human rights defenders; and
- End restrictions on their freedom of movement (including the right to travel abroad), expression, association and peaceful assembly.

2. Guarantee an open environment that is favourable to those wishing to engage in defending women's rights, and other human rights, and in particular:

- Revise the Law on Associations and Foundations of 1 December 2015, to enable civil society organisations to work freely and independently without undue interference by the authorities;
- Encourage, authorise and facilitate the creation of associations and foundations to promote and protect human rights and human rights defenders;
- Grant organisations, groups and individuals the right to express their opinion, share information, exchange their opinions with the public and make recommendations to governments and to international human rights bodies;
- Authorise foreign funding and collaboration between Saudi organisations and organisations abroad;
- Abolish the male guardianship system;
- Revise the Anti-Terrorism Law, royal decree 44, anti-cybercrimes law as well as other criminal laws containing vague provisions to ensure they comply with international human rights norms and, in particular, prevent them from being used for the purposes of repressing human rights defenders;
- Consult civil society, including human rights defenders, on the reforms to be carried out in the country;
- Lift the reservations made to the CEDAW to allow Saudi women to fully enjoy their rights as enshrined in the Convention; and ratify the Optional Protocol to the CEDAW; and
- Cooperate with and allow access to the country to players from the human rights system of protection: UN representatives, mechanisms and special procedures (notably the Special Rapporteur on the Rights to Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and of Association, the Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders, the Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, its Causes and Consequences, the Working Group on the issue of Discrimination Against Women in Law and in Practice and the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention), international and regional NGOs.

We urge the UN General Assembly to:

1. Call on Saudi Arabia to uphold its obligations as a member of the UN Human Rights Council;
2. Should Saudi Arabia fail to adhere to international human rights standards, suspend Saudi Arabia from the Human Rights Council pursuant to Resolution 60/251, Article 8; and

3. Stop electing Saudi Arabia to UN human rights bodies, particularly related to women's rights as long as women's equality is not guaranteed in the Kingdom.