



# General Assembly

Distr.: General  
15 February 2017

English only

---

## Human Rights Council

Thirty-fourth session

Agenda item 3

**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,  
political, economic, social and cultural rights,  
including the right to development**

### **Written statement\* submitted by the Americans for Democracy & Human Rights in Bahrain Inc, a non- governmental organization in special consultative status**

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

[11 February 2017]

---

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

GE.17-02324(E)



\* 1 7 0 2 3 2 4 \*

Please recycle



## **Human Rights Abuses Throughout the Gulf Cooperation Council**

Americans for Democracy & Human Rights in Bahrain would like to take this opportunity at the 34th Session of the United Nations Human Rights Council to discuss widespread human rights abuses throughout the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), including intensified violations of the rights to free expression, right to fair employment practices, and the right to life.

The human rights climate Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Kuwait, Oman, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) remains an issue of deep concern. In 2016, Saudi Arabia continued to maintain a high rate of executions, carrying out 153 executions in total last year. It refused to reform the restrictive male guardianship system, amplified its campaign against human rights defenders, and continued its armed engagement in Yemen. Oman targeted journalists and free expression by suppressing a privately-owned newspaper and arresting its editors. The government of Kuwait continued to discriminate against its *Bidoon* population, while Qatar continued to violate the rights of its migrant labor workforce. Throughout 2016, the UAE has targeted dissidents and utilized advanced cyber-surveillance technology to monitor and suppress activists.

### **1. Saudi Arabia**

Throughout 2016, Saudi Arabia has amplified its campaign against the country's dwindling number of human rights defenders. The government began 2016 with the arrest on 12 January of prominent human rights defender Samar Badawi, the sister of imprisoned blogger Raid Badawi. Officials later released her following an international outcry. However, the government continued to prosecute members of the Saudi Association for Civil and Political Rights (ACPRA). The Specialized Criminal Court, the country's counter-terror court, sentenced ACPRA members Abdulaziz al-Shubaily, Isa al-Hamid, Omar al-Said, and Saleh al-Ashwan to prison sentences ranging from 5 to 11 years.

Despite promises to increase women's status and opportunities in society, the government did not take steps to abolish or reform the discriminatory male guardianship system that restricts women's movement, actions and autonomy. It mandates that every woman be subjugated to a male guardian who is empowered to make important decisions regarding her affairs, including travel, marriage, and work. In July 2016, women across the country began denouncing the practice in unprecedented levels. In September 2016, more than 14,000 women signed a petition imploring the king to abolish the practice. However, government officials ignored the petition and sided with senior clerics who called the women's activism a "crime."

In 2016, the Saudi government carried out 153 executions. This is the second highest number of executions carried out by the Saudi government in over two decades, second only to the 158 executions carried out in 2015. The majority of those executed were sentenced for non-violent drug offenses and murder. On 2 January 2016, the authorities executed 47 individuals in a mass execution across the kingdom. Among those killed was prominent Shia cleric and social justice activist Sheikh Nimr Baqir al-Nimr and four young men sentenced to die for crimes they allegedly committed as minors. The trend of executing people sentenced over crimes allegedly committed while underage will likely continue in 2017, as there are currently at least four people on death row for crimes supposedly committed as a juvenile.

Saudi Arabia leads a coalition of co-belligerent Arab countries in the conflict in Yemen. The Saudi-led coalition has conducted hundreds of airstrikes and imposed a naval and air blockade on Houthi-occupied territory. The cumulative effect of these tactics has led to the deaths of thousands of civilians from airstrikes and a humanitarian crisis that, by June 2015, had left nearly 80 percent of Yemen's population in urgent need of food, water, and medical aid. While the Saudi government lifted the air blockade in October 2016 after the bombing of a funeral hall which killed at least 140 people, subsequent aid deliveries have not been enough as the fighting has left the country on the brink of famine.

In the course of the coalition's operations in Yemen, airstrikes have struck hospitals, weddings, markets, schools, refugee camps, factories, and vital infrastructure, including water structures. Airstrikes hit several hospitals run by Médecins Sans Frontières, causing the organization to pull out of northern Yemen. Among the weapons used by the coalition are British- and American-made cluster munitions.

## **2. Qatar**

The Qatari government has consistently violated the human rights of its migrant laborers. Among the human rights violations and labor abuses migrant laborers reported is deception concerning the type of work they would carry out when they arrived from their home country to Qatar, receiving lower than negotiated salaries, and wage withholding for terms of several months. They also reported poor and cramped conditions in living spaces, arbitrary non-renewal of residency permits and thus at risk of deportation, passports confiscation upon arrival in Qatar, and threats for raising complains over poor working and living conditions.

These issues stem from Qatar's *kafala* system, whereby a foreign worker who desires to work in Qatar needs the sponsorship of a Qatari company in order to enter and work in Qatar. This system ties migrant workers to their employer, leaving them vulnerable to exploitative practices. On 13 December 2016, the Qatari government signed a new law ostensibly ending the *kafala* system. However, the law failed to abolish the most exploitative aspects of the sponsorship system and workers remain vulnerable to abuse by their employers.

## **3. Kuwait**

The Kuwaiti government systematically violates the rights of its *Bidoon* population. The *Bidoon* are residents of Kuwait who do not have a nationality. They number around 100,000 or 10 percent of the country's population. The government discriminates against them because they lack citizenship documents. The majority of *Bidoon* live in poverty and work on the margins of Kuwaiti society. Without citizenship documentation, until March 2011, they were not eligible for many of the benefits of citizenship, including free healthcare, access to high quality, higher education, and good jobs.

In March 2011, *Bidoon* protested ongoing state-sanctioned prejudice. After international pressure, the government granted *Bidoon* access to government-run healthcare and higher education. However, *Bidoon* still face discriminatory practices and possible deportation. In May 2014, the Kuwaiti government announced that it would negotiate with other states to naturalize its *Bidoon* population. In November 2014, Kuwait reached an agreement with the Comoros whereby the Comorian government would extend citizenship to Kuwait's *Bidoon* population. This deal, and the 2012 forced exile of activist Ahmed Abd al-Khaleq, an advocate for the rights of the *Bidoon*, has raised fears that Kuwait might force its *Bidoon* population to move to the Comoros or be deported. While the situation remains unresolved, throughout 2016, Kuwait has continued to harass and detain *Bidoon* activists, including Abdulhakim al-Fadhli and Nawaf al-Hendal.

## **4. Oman**

Over the past several years, the Omani government has detained and arrested a number of journalists, most recently in September 2016. In July 2014, Omani blogger Muawiyah al-Rawahi disappeared after being summoned by intelligence officials. He reappeared in August 2014 at a psychiatric hospital with his legs shackled. He was detained again in 2015 after attempting to enter the UAE by car from Oman. In August and September 2016, Omani authorities detained three journalists from the newspaper *Azamn* after it published an article questioning the independence of the judiciary and published allegations of judicial corruption. On 26 September 2016, an Omani court sentenced the three men to prison, fined them, and ordered *Azamn* to close.

## **5. United Arab Emirates**

Over the past two years, the UAE has continued to suppress dissidents and prosecute activists for exercising their right to free speech. It has employed advanced cybersecurity technology to target activists who criticize the state, particularly

on the internet. Among those the government has targeted for their criticism of the state and its policies are Dr. Nasser bin Ghaith, Ahmed Mansoor, Osama al-Najjar, and Dr. Abdulkhaleq Abdulla.

Emirati officials arrested academic Dr. Nasser bin Ghaith on 18 August 2015 after he posted a series of tweets criticizing Egyptian authorities after the killing of demonstrators in Raba'a Square in 2013. Since his arrest, he has been held incommunicado for more than nine months. On 17 March 2014, officials arrested human rights defender Osama al-Najjar and accused him of insulting the state via Twitter. On 16 January 2017, authorities arrested academic and activist Dr. Abdulkhaleq Abdulla for promoting free expression on Twitter.

On 10 and 11 August 2016, prominent human rights activist Ahmed Mansour, who has been targeted repeatedly since 2011, found himself the victim of invasive spyware that turned his cellphone into a monitoring device. The Emirati government was responsible for the cyber-attack. The attack is part of the UAE government's use of sophisticated cyber technology to control and monitor its citizens.

## **6. Recommendations**

ADHRB calls on all governments of the Gulf Cooperation Council to:

- Enshrine in law and in practice, protections for free expression and the press, including individuals' right to criticize their government
- End all harassment, prosecution and restrictions on civil society, human rights defenders, and activists
- Effectively end the *kafala* system of migrant worker sponsorship, and adhere to international labor rights standards
- Enact an immediate moratorium on the death penalty.