



# General Assembly

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## Human Rights Council

Forty-first session

24 June–12 July 2019

Agenda item 2

**Annual report of the United Nations High Commissioner  
for Human Rights and reports of the Office of the  
High Commissioner and the Secretary-General**

### **Written statement\* submitted by Organization for Defending Victims of Violence, 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.

[01 June 2019]

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\* Issued as received, in the language(s) of submission only.



## Human Rights situation in Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates (UAE)

In line with the annual report presented by the United Nations High Commissionaire for Human Rights on the situation of human rights around the world, the Organization for Defending Victims of Violence (ODVV) would like to express its concerns over the human rights situation in Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates.

### Saudi Arabia

The authorities severely restrict freedoms of expression, association and assembly. They continue to repress peaceful activists and dissidents, harassing writers, religious scholars, bloggers and online commentators. Independent human rights organizations are forcibly shut down and almost all their members are convicted and sentenced, fled the country, or were brought to trial. The authorities continue to arrest, prosecute and sentence human rights defenders on vaguely worded charges that extensively drew on the Counter-Terrorism Law.<sup>1</sup> Also political parties remain outlawed in Saudi Arabia. The death sentence continues to be used against political dissenters after unfair trials.

Moreover, anti-Shiism, or the systematic targeting of Shia Muslims, plagues the nation. The specialized Criminal Court (SCC) continued to try Shi'a activists for their alleged participation in protests in 2011 and 2012.<sup>2</sup> Just recently 37 men were executed for terror-related crimes, most of them were Shia and according to documents they have been tortured into making false confessions.<sup>3</sup> Security officials continue to torture with complete impunity.

Furthermore, the Saudi Arabia-led military coalition continues to bomb areas in Yemen killing and injuring civilians. Some attacks amounted to war crimes.<sup>4</sup> More than half of the victims have been reported to be civilian women and children. There are also indirect effects of the conflict including the spread of cholera. The war has also lead to the displacement of about 3 million people and destruction of infrastructures including more than 827 schools and educational institutions, and 301 hospitals and health centres.<sup>5</sup>

- ODVV calls on Saudi Arabia to take steps to bring the criminal procedure system in line with international standards including through strengthened application of international safeguards in the use of the death penalty.
- ODVV urges the authorities to end anti-Shia educational and social efforts and allow inclusion of Shia individuals in government and decision making positions.

Being seriously concerned about the humanitarian tragedies in Yemen, ODVV calls on the Security Council to use its political power and urge all Yemen parties to resort to political solutions to the conflict.

### The Kingdom of Bahrain

Freedom of expression remains severely restricted and the authorities have arrested, detained, interrogated and prosecuted human rights defenders, political activists and Shi'a clerics and others who criticize government policies, Saudi Arabia or the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen.<sup>6</sup> Since nationwide anti-government protests in 2011, Bahraini

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.amnesty.org/en/countries/middle-east-and-north-africa/saudi-arabia/report-saudi-arabia/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2017/07/saudi-arabia-death-penalty-used-as-political-weapon-against-shia-as-executions-spike-across-country/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://edition.cnn.com/2019/04/26/middleeast/saudi-executions-court-documents-intl/index.html>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=23479&LangID=E>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.straitstimes.com/world/middle-east/115-dead-as-yemen-cholera-outbreak-spreads-icrc>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.amnesty.org/en/countries/middle-east-and-north-africa/bahrain/report-bahrain/>

authorities severely suppress the dissidents, especially the leaders of opposition groups like Sheikh Ali Salman, Sheikh Hassan Sultan, or Nabeel Rajab.

Also there is a sharp rise in the trend of stripping individuals of their nationality which is a violation of international law. The courts are allowed to revoke the citizenship of any citizen convicted of a terrorist offense,<sup>7</sup> an offense that is defined very broadly and ambiguously under Bahraini law.<sup>8</sup> Since 2012, Bahraini has denationalized 990 people.<sup>9</sup>

- ODVV calls on the Bahrain to combat intolerance as well as discrimination, incitement to violence and violence against persons based on religion or belief.
- ODVV urges the government to avoid intimidation and harassment of human rights defenders, journalists and civil society organizations. And to release all persons detained solely for the exercise of their right to freedom of expression.
- ODVV requests the authorities to end the revocation of nationality and to immediately reinstate all those who have been denationalized and to compensate for their loss of citizenship.

## The United Arab Emirates

The UAE is a leading member of the Saudi-led coalition operating in Yemen. There are reports of abuses committed by UAE proxy forces, including use of excessive force during arrests, detaining family members of wanted suspects to pressure them to “voluntarily” turn themselves in, arbitrarily detaining men and boys, detaining children with adults, and forcibly disappearing dozens of people.<sup>10</sup>

Also the secret prisons<sup>11</sup> in Yemen, run by the United Arab Emirates<sup>12</sup> and by Yemeni forces it created and abuse and torture are routine<sup>13</sup> while, the authorities claim that the UAE has never managed or run prisons or secret detention centers in Yemen. However, there are reports of widespread use of torture and other ill-treatment in Yemeni and Emirati facilities, including beatings, use of electric shocks and sexual violence which are amounting to war crimes.<sup>14</sup>

Furthermore, migrant workers, who comprised a vast majority of the private workforce, continue to face exploitation and abuse despite some reforms. The UN CERD Committee expressed concern over the lack of monitoring and enforcement of measures to protect migrant workers, and over barriers faced by migrant workers in accessing justice.<sup>15</sup>

ODVV calls on UAE to ratify International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)

ODVV calls on UAE to stop targeting of civilians on the pretext of combating against Ansarollah and protect civilians lives especially the lives of women and children in both military operations and secret prisons.

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.worldstateless.org/continents/middle-east-northern-africa/arbitrary-deprivation-of-nationality-in-the-gulf-region>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2019/country-chapters/bahrain>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.adhrb.org/2019/04/adhrb-remains-concerned-about-the-arbitrary-deprivation-of-citizenship/>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.amnesty.org/en/countries/middle-east-and-north-africa/united-arab-emirates/report-united-arab-emirates/>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2018/07/timeline-uaes-role-in-southern-yemens-secret-prisons/>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-yemen-security-emirates/amnesty-calls-for-probe-of-torture-claims-at-yemen-detention-centers-idUSKBN1K2015>

<sup>13</sup> <https://apnews.com/b2a5ecfd1adb442a86df5bd05bc6599e>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2018/07/disappearances-and-torture-in-southern-yemen-detention-facilities-must-be-investigated-as-war-crimes/>

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.amnesty.org/en/countries/middle-east-and-north-africa/united-arab-emirates/report-united-arab-emirates/>

ODVV calls on the UAE to continue efforts aiming at the reinforcement of the protection of the rights of foreign workers and to protect foreign labourers through the adoption of legislations in accordance to international human rights law.

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