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

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.

[26 May 2020]

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

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Concerns on Women's Rights Violations in Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates (the UAE)

Saudi Arabia

Organization for Defending Victims of Violence (ODVV) draws the Human Rights Council attention to the situation of human rights defenders in Saudi Arabia and is calling upon the Kingdom to release several notable women's rights defenders, two years after they were detained. They had been peacefully advocating for women's rights in the kingdom to drive, as well as broader reforms related to the repressive male guardianship system. ODVV is deeply concerned that in prison, many may have suffered mental and physical anguish – including torture, sexual abuse and solitary confinement. And scores of others, though released, still face trial based on charges relating to their peaceful activism.[1]

In addition, ODVV highlights its unease regarding the situation in Saudi prisons, which are presently overpopulated and represent easy vectors for viral virus transmission. This concern is compounded by the Saudi government's disregard for the rights of prisoners, and its failure to take direct steps to reduce the dangerous effects of the Corona virus in prisons.[2]

Finally, ODVV expresses its serious concern over the negative effect of Saudi foreign interference in Yemen on women and children. This war has had a devastating effect on the lives of women and children. The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) has warned of the deaths of more than 48,000[3] Yemeni women due to pregnancy and childbirth complications as a result of lack of access to medical care. Half of the health centers in Yemen are either completely closed or operating partially, and only 20 percent of these centers provide maternal and child health services following the war. Also, the widespread malnutrition is threatening many women, over one million pregnant and lactating women are in need of treatment for acute malnutrition.[4]

Air strikes carried out by the Saudi-led coalition in the country hit civilian targets, including hospitals, schools and food stores, killing or injuring over 18,400 civilians.[5]

Bahrain

ODVV expresses concerns on the conditions of women in Bahrain's prisons specially "Isa Town", a prison condemned by the United Nations and human rights groups for its degrading treatment and poor conditions. At the moment, the conditions significantly raise the risk of COVID-19 spreading. ODVV is alarmed by the authorities' persistent failure to provide adequate medical care in prisons. The Bahraini authorities must immediately release peaceful political activists amidst growing concerns of a COVID-19 spread.[6]

The United Arab Emirates (UAE)

ODVV expresses deep concern at the alleged torture and ill treatment of Ms. Maryam Al-Balushi, as well as Ms. Amina Ahmed Saeed Al-Alabdouli and Ms. Alia Abdulnour,[7] resulting in their health deteriorating due to the conditions of detention and lack of appropriate medical treatment. Prolonged incommunicado detention can facilitate the

[1] https://bit.ly/2AYkN3o.
[2] https://www.esohr.org/en/?p=2750.
[3] https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/05/1065122.
[4] https://www.unfpa.org/press/one-million-yemeni-women-risk-due-lack-funding-says-unfpa.
[5] Source: Yemen Data Project.
[6] https://bit.ly/2YTYB2v; http://www.bahrainmirror.com/en/news/57617.html.
[7] Female prisoner of conscience Alia Abdulnour has died after a long fight with advanced liver cancer.

perpetration of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment and can in itself constitute a form of such treatment.[8]

Amid growing concerns over the spread of Coronavirus in prisons and the alarming numbers of infections around the world, ODVV expresses its serious worries over the lives of prisoners of conscious, especially women, in the UAE prisons and calls for their immediate release. Prisoners are already held in inhumane conditions characterized by ill-treatment, torture, denial of medical care, overcrowded cells, and poor hygiene and sanitation conditions which makes prisons fertile grounds for the spread of COVID-19.[9]

Recommendations

- ODVV is calling on Saudi Arabia to immediately and unconditionally release all prisoners of conscience, specially the women rights defenders solely detained in connection with their peaceful exercise of their freedom of expression.
- ODVV urges the UN not to be negligent towards investigation of those responsible for the alarming death of women in Yemen, and adopt a resolution for investigation and studying their death.
- ODVV calls on Bahrain to respond to the call of the High Commissioner for Human Rights for the immediate release of prisoners of conscience, especially women inmates and to take urgent and humanitarian measures to confront the spread of Coronavirus.
- ODVV urges the UAE to investigate and reform detention conditions for all prisoners, especially for women, that amount to torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.
- In light of the Coronavirus outbreak and given the appalling conditions inside UAE detention centers, ODVV reminds the authorities that they are under a clear obligation to take necessary measures to save the lives of detainees, in accordance with international human rights law and based on the relevant international resolutions. ODVV urges them to take all precautionary measures to prevent the spread and the diffusion of Covid-19 inside the centres by releasing the prisoners, especially women political prisoners and/or improving health conditions and providing detainees with the means of disease prevention.

[8] https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=25726&LangID=E.
[9] http://www.echr.org.uk/en/news/coronavirus-spreads-uae-authorities-must-act-now-protect-prisoners.