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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 Liberal International, a non-governmental organization in general consultative status

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

[5 February 2024]

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



Urgent Appeal for Action on Human Rights Violations in Saudi Arabia: Case of Raif Badawi

We, Liberal International, would like to draw the attention of the High Commissioner and the Human Rights Council to the persisting human rights violations occurring in Saudi Arabia, and in particular the case of human rights advocate and prisoner of conscience Raif Badawi, in this communication.

Badawi was sentenced to ten years in prison in 2014, a 1 million Saudi Arabian riyal fine, and a thousand lashes, for advocating an end to religious influence on public life.

This punishment was grossly unfair, cruel, and inhumane. We urge the UNHRC and the international community to hold the Saudi leadership accountable for their acts, and to do their utmost to free all the other Saudi Arabian prisoners of conscience.

Raif Badawi was released from his ten-year imprisonment on 11 March 2022, but still is not allowed to express himself freely or travel from Saudi Arabia to reunite with his family in Canada. This ten-year travel ban is in clear violation of his freedom of movement. Liberal International condemns these restrictions on his freedom.

As recipient of many international prizes, among them the Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought 2015 of the European Parliament and Liberal International's Prize for Freedom 2016, Badawi has become an international symbol of the struggle for human rights in Saudi Arabia and the Middle East. His release into the arms of his family would send a strong signal for a new Saudi Arabia.

In a country ranked 170th out of 180 in the Reporters Without Borders 2021 World Press Freedom Index, Badawi's case is no anomaly. In Saudi Arabia, government critics, women's rights activists, human rights defenders, relatives of activists, journalists, as well as members of the Shia minority are arbitrarily imprisoned on a regular basis. Surveillance technology is used to target dissidents. The maltreatment and torture of prisoners is regularly reported.

In addition, the country ranks as the 2nd highest in the world for use of the death penalty. Saudi Arabia executed at least 172 people in 2023.

Recommendations

Liberal International calls on the Special Rapporteur to:

- Strongly condemn and hold accountable the Saudi Arabian government for the punishment of Raif Badawi and demand the unconditional release of Badawi to allow him to reunite with his family.
- Monitor the cases of other human rights defenders in Saudi Arabia and ensure accountability for crimes against them.
- Call on the Saudi Arabian government to end the use of corporal punishment, specifically the inhumane practice of flogging, and uphold its international obligations to respect human rights.
- Prevent hosting important world events, like the Internet Government Forum 2024, in Saudi Arabia while the country is violating its people's fundamental human rights.