

Hello, my name is Husain Abdulla, and I am the Executive Director of Americans for Democracy & Human Rights in Bahrain. My organization and I have been working diligently to document Saudi Arabia's lack of compliance with international human rights standards. Today, I am here to bring attention to two very serious concerns in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia: migrant rights and digital freedom of expression.

Starting from the appalling situation of migrant workers, who are regularly victims of abuse and exploitation. We have to mention the previous recommendations that the Saudi government supported, such as recommendation 138.116, in which the government stated it would adopt appropriate and concrete measures to address the issue of discrimination and exploitation of migrant workers; or recommendation 138.31, in which it stated it would continue to strengthen domestic legislation to promote and protect the rights of women, children, domestic workers and the migrant workers. There are at least 15 recommendations in which the Saudi government promised to support and promote and strengthen migrants rights. However, Saudi authorities continue to maintain one of the most restrictive and harsh kafala visa sponsorship systems.

Even though Saudi Arabia recently introduced "reforms" to the kafala sponsorship system, aimed to facilitate the situation. So, are these reforms realized in daily life? No, they leave many migrant workers vulnerable. Let's be clear: these changes are just scratching the surface and do little to protect migrant domestic workers from the rampant abuses they endure. In March 2021, Saudi Arabia introduced labor reforms aimed at easing certain restrictions and allowing some migrant workers to change jobs without employer consent in specific circumstances. However, these reforms do not completely dismantle the Kafala system and have significant limitations. Notably, they exclude certain categories of migrant workers, leaving them vulnerable to abuse. Even with these reforms, the Kafala system still maintains several problematic elements. As a matter of fact, many human rights violations against migrant workers persist, including unpaid and

delayed wages and passport confiscations. The harsh reality is that domestic migrant workers continue to be deprived of basic labor rights. Saudi officials have launched a ruthless assault on anyone accused of violating residence, border, and labor laws. As a result, thousands of Ethiopian migrants have been arbitrarily detained and forcibly deported based only on their immigration status.

Furthermore, Saudi border guards have been linked to the deaths of hundreds of Ethiopian migrants and asylum seekers who attempted to cross the Yemen-Saudi border. According to reports, hundreds of Ethiopians were killed. Those who were lucky enough to survive were subjected to arbitrary arrests, abuse, and even forced disappearances.

Now, we will look at digital freedom of expression. In the prior UPR cycle, Saudi Arabia accepted recommendation 138.53, stating that the Kingdom will bring its domestic legislation in line with the rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly, and will enact and implement a law of association enabling all NGOs to operate legally, without harassment and undue government interference. However, Saudi Arabia keeps being notorious for its autocracy, lack of freedom, and persecution of dissenting voices. The case of Mohammed al-Ghamdi, a retired teacher sentenced to death simply for peaceful social media activity, represents an alarming increase in the Kingdom's persecution of free expression, both online and offline.

On June 11, 2022, Saudi security forces arrested and prosecuted Muhammad Al Ghamdi, a teacher, with criminal offenses over opinions expressed on social media. Among the charges were "betrayal of his religion, country and rulers" , "spreading false rumors with intent to disrupt public order and destabilize security" as well as "supporting terrorist ideology and a terrorist group" . His tweets centered on unemployment, inflation, and government resource mismanagement, and called for the release of political prisoners. For all of this, Mohammed al-

Ghamdi was sentenced to death. Unfortunately, Mohammed's sentencing is just one example of Saudi Arabia's crackdown on digital freedom of expression.

Let's remember that five years have passed since the brutal murder of prominent Saudi journalist and human rights advocate Jamal Khashoggi by the Saudi government. In October 2018, Jamal Khashoggi, a US-based journalist and critic of Saudi Arabia's government, walked into the Saudi consulate in Istanbul, where he was murdered. It was later revealed that Khashoggi had been targeted for illegal cybersurveillance by the Saudi state. For more than two weeks, Saudi Arabia consistently denied any knowledge of Khashoggi's fate, and even now, after 5 years, there has been no justice for Jamal.

The grim reality is that Saudi Arabia's online space has become a battleground where the authorities vehemently suppress free speech. The government of Saudi Arabia has an extensive record of spying on its citizens, including illegally accessing their personal information and using spyware to track and censor journalists, dissidents, and human rights defenders, both at home and in exile. Activists face persecution under draconian Anti-Cybercrime and Counter-Terrorism Laws merely for posting tweets critical of the Saudi government. This crackdown has coerced many into resorting to anonymous online identities, but even these measures offer little protection.

At this crucial point in time, it is imperative that we demand immediate and meaningful action. Saudi Arabia should be held accountable for its failure to implement UPR recommendations. The harsh realities of migrant rights abuses and ongoing injustices faced by all the citizens in Saudi Arabia demand not just our attention but also our unwavering determination. It is clear that Saudi Arabia has disregarded human rights by failing to implement its UPR recommendations. We do not aim for a soft approach but a firm and unwavering position against these transgressions. We must demand swift and meaningful action.

To the leadership of Saudi Arabia, the time for change is now. ADHRB urgently calls on you to:

- Dismantle the kafala system, granting workers independence from employer ties.
- Cease arbitrary detentions and violations against migrant workers, particularly Ethiopian migrants.
- Implement previously committed UPR recommendations, including those regarding migrant rights.
- Halt all surveillance operations and respect the right to privacy for citizens and residents.
- Release individuals arrested for peaceful online expression, while abolishing content-based offenses in the Anti-Cybercrime Law.
- Implement previous recommendations to which you have already committed. Specifically, you accepted respectively 23 recommendations regarding migrants rights and only 4 recommendations regarding freedom of expression. Yet, there's been little to no visible progress. ADHRB is proposing a resubmission of these recommendations to Saudi Arabia as a direct echo of the previous cycle's submission, highlighting the lack of action taken by the country.

To those in the international community listening now, let us echo collective demands word for word and send an unequivocal message to Saudi Arabia that we recognize the gravity of these issues and seek their resolution. This is not just about us; it is about the very essence of human rights and the values we hold dear as a global community.

Thank you for the attention and your unwavering commitment.