

Saudi Arabia

The human rights situation in Saudi Arabia continued to be dire throughout 2011, as the government adopted policies to stifle and repress the type of unrest seen in other countries within the region. The authorities adopted strict measures to suppress peaceful demonstrations demanding democratic reforms and a constitutional monarchy, and hundreds of people were harassed or detained for their participation in peaceful demonstrations. These measures even targeted members of the Syrian community in Saudi Arabia who demonstrated against the ongoing massacres in their homeland. The authorities continued to repress reform advocates and human rights defendants, using arbitrary detention, torture, and unfair trials, and they became even less tolerant of dissenting opinions and criticisms in the media. Systematic discrimination against Shiites continued to be a source of increasing tensions in the Eastern Province, which is home to a Shiite majority. Toward the end of the year, these tensions evolved into violent clashes between local residents and security forces because of the arbitrary detention of several prominent Shiite figures and those who took part in peaceful protests. In addition, people were detained by the government as hostages to be used as bargaining chips in order to pressure their relatives to turn themselves in.

Legislation in the kingdom saw no significant positive developments to change its hostile stance towards human rights. On the contrary, legislative changes tended to impose increased restrictions on freedom of expression, and new counterterrorism legislation under consideration would, if passed, constitute an even greater threat to human rights in the country.

The kingdom took on an expanded role in regional politics in 2011, supporting autocratic leaders and governments in the region, offering shelter to Tunisian despot Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali, and sending Saudi forces to actively participate in quashing the popular uprising in Bahrain.

Affirmations of women's right to vote and run for office in future municipal elections and official expressions of intent to include women as members of the Shura Council will do little to brighten Saudi Arabia's human rights record as long as the paternal system of guardianship for women persists, as seen, for example, in women's inability to obtain passports without the approval of their male guardians.

Negative legislative developments:

The authorities adopted further repressive legislation in 2011. On the pretext of combating terrorism, the authorities drafted a penal law on terrorism crimes and the financing of terrorism.¹ If passed, the law would allow the authorities to detain people for over one year without charge or any legal safeguards for detainees. The text of the law leaves room for the abuse of dissidents and regime critics, mandating a ten-year prison sentence for those who cast aspersions on the integrity of the King or Crown Prince. The law also uses an expansive definition of terrorism crimes—including such things as endangering national unity or defaming the country's reputation or status—which may be interpreted to harass, prosecute, and punish persons for actions that fall squarely under the rubric of freedom of peaceful expression or peaceful protest.²

In May, a royal edict was issued amending the publications law,³ strengthening already restrictive regulations. The amendments aim primarily to protect religious figures from criticism and to circumscribe opinions or ideas that undermine official interpretations of Islamic law. The amendments ban the publication of any materials that violate Islamic law, inflame sectarian tensions, encourage crime, or advocate undermining the security of the country or the public order. They also prohibit the publication of any documents or materials that harm the reputation of or insult the chief mufti

¹ To read a copy of the draft law and the report of the security committee on the law, see: <www.amnesty.org/sites/impact.amnesty.org/files/PUBLIC/Saudi%20anti-terror.pdf> and <<http://goo.gl/ZXe9y>>.

² Amnesty International, "Proposed Saudi Anti-Terrorism Law Would Strangle Peaceful Protest," July 21, 2011, <<http://www.amnesty.org/en/news-and-updates/proposed-saudi-arabian-anti-terror-law-would-strangle-peaceful-protest-2011-07-22>>.

³ For the text of the amendments, see "Amr malaki: ta'dil ba'd mawad nizam al-matbu'at wa-l-nashr," 5/25/1432 AH, <<http://www.ksaking.com/news.php?action=show&id=273>>.

of the kingdom, members of the Council of Senior Religious Scholars, and state employees. Also banned is the publication of any information about investigations or trials without prior permission. The amendments give the Ministry of Culture and Information the right to confiscate or suspend any publication without compensation if it publishes any of these banned items.

The amendments carry penalties including fines, bans on writing in newspapers and other publications, and bans on appearances in satellite media broadcasts. Offending newspapers may be shut down with the approval of the prime minister, and the minister of information has the authority to shut down or block any websites or online newspapers in violation.⁴

The Saudi authorities also imposed further restrictions on the electronic media via the so-called implementing regulations for electronic publication, approved in early 2011. The regulations require all blogs and electronic websites to register with the Ministry of Information and Culture. Under the new regulations, every person who publishes content online, including comments on electronic forums – and even those who send SMS messages via mobile phones – must receive a license, which must be renewed every three years.

Applicants for an electronic publication license must be Saudi nationals, at least 20 years old, and possess a high-school diploma or the equivalent; they must also have a clean record and an email address. The regulations require online newspapers to appoint an editor-in-chief approved by the Ministry, and they impose a fine of 100,000 Saudi riyals (approximately \$26,000) for any blogger who does not obtain a license and allow for the permanent banning of his or her blog.⁵

⁴ Arab Reform Initiative, “Royal Decree Issued to Amend Saudi Media Law,” May 1, 2011, <<http://www.arab-reform.net/spip.php?article4750>>; BBC, “al-‘Ahil al-Sa’udi yu’addil qanun al-matbu’at,” Apr. 30, 2011, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/arabic/multimedia/2011/04/110430_saudi_press.shtml>; download the implementing regulations at <<http://www.info.gov.sa/E-ServicesForm/electronicPublishing.aspx>>.

⁵ BBC, “al-Sa’udiya tufriid quyudan ‘ala-l-nashr al-ilaktruni wa-l-mudawwinat,” Jan. 11, 2011, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/arabic/middleeast/2011/01/110110_saudi_blogging_regulations.shtml>; Arabic Network for Human Rights Information, “al-La’iha al-tanfidhiya li-nashat al-nashr al-ilaktruni fi-l-Sa’udiya muthir li-l-qalaq,” Jan. 14, 2011, <<http://www.anhri.net/?p=22643>>.

Ongoing pressure on human rights defenders and reform advocates:

On March 21, 2011, Mohammed Saleh al-Bejadi, a member of the Saudi Civil and Political Rights Association (ACPRA), was arrested while taking part in a demonstration demanding the release of detainees in front of the Saudi Interior Ministry. Al-Bejadi had previously been imprisoned twice and has been banned from travel for the last three years.⁶ Al-Bejadi was referred to trial in August, after four months of detention in solitary confinement, on charges of supporting the revolution in Bahrain and forming an illegal organization. He was denied contact with his lawyers and family, and motions filed by lawyers to defend him were denied based on the claim that he did not wish to appoint defense counsel but instead wanted to defend himself. Notably, al-Bejadi did not ask to defend himself and was not informed of the presence of the attorneys.⁷

The fate of Syrian publisher and member of the Arab Commission for Human Rights, Alaa al-Din al-Rashi, remained unknown after his disappearance on March 23, 2011, when he was kidnapped in front of the place where he was staying in Riyadh. He had been invited to attend the Riyadh International Book Fair by the Saudi Ministry of Culture and Information as a publisher; his publishing house has released several works by the prominent reformist writer Abdullah al-Hamed calling for the establishment of a constitutional monarchy in Saudi Arabia.⁸

On March 20, activist Mubarak Bin Zuair was arrested after meeting with Mohammed Bin Nayef, the deputy minister of interior for security affairs, to discuss the release of several detainees. The secret police stopped and detained him the next day shortly before his meeting with demonstrators to inform them of the outcome of the meeting.⁹

In early May, rights activist Fadhil Makki al-Manasif was arrested in al-Awwamiya in the Eastern Province. It was suspected that his arrest was linked to his writings on human rights abuses in the kingdom, violations targeting Shiites, and detentions of peaceful demonstrators.¹⁰ Al-Manasif

⁶ Human Rights First Society, "HRFS Calls for the Immediate Release of Mr. Mohamed Albjadi," Mar. 23, 2011, <https://acrobat.com/app.html#d=5W3Pgr*WKvLEGOk4zIC*Hw>.

⁷ Alkarama, "al-Sa'udiya: al-muhakama al-sirriya li-l-sayyid Muhammad Salih al-Bijadi," Sep. 6, 2011, <<http://goo.gl/j4l7G>>.

⁸ HRFS, "Immediate Freedom for the Syrian Publisher Dr. Alaaeddin al-Rashi," Mar. 23, 2011, <<https://acrobat.com/app.html#d=7JOTmFiIHNvSaZBLi96brg>>.

⁹ HRFS, "HRFS Strongly Condemns the Illegal Arrest of Dr. Mubarak Bin Zuhair on March 20, 2011," Mar. 30, 2011, <<https://acrobat.com/app.html#d=7JOTmFiIHNvSaZBLi96brg>>.

¹⁰ Human Rights Watch, "Saudi Arabia: Rights Activist, Bloggers Arrested," May 2, 2011, <<http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2011/05/03/saudi-arabia-rights-activist-bloggers-arrested>>.

was released in August 2011 only to be arrested again on October 2, when he was taken to the General Intelligence prison in Dammam. It is feared that he may be subjected to torture, particularly since he has not been permitted to contact his attorney or receive visits from his family.¹¹

On July 8, the Saudi authorities detained Dr. Yousuf al-Ahmad, a religious scholar and academic at the Imam Muhammad Ibn Saud Islamic University, after his criticism of the government - particularly for its practices of arbitrary arrest - in a video made public on YouTube. Al-Ahmad criticized the long-term detention of security suspects without charge or trial, as well as the arrest of women peacefully protesting the long-term detention of their male relatives.¹²

On September 11, the trial of rights activist Waleed Abulkhair began; Abulkhair is accused of insulting the judiciary, contacting foreign bodies, demanding a constitutional monarchy, participating in defamatory media programs, and inciting public opinion against the public order. He is a prominent reform advocate who in February 2011 gathered thousands signatures on a petition calling for change and democratic reform.¹³

On September 26, 2011, the Saudi authorities detained social activist Ali Hussein al-Dubaisi. He was stopped at a checkpoint at the northern entrance of al-Awwamiya, located in the eastern part of the country, and his car was thoroughly searched before he was taken to an undisclosed location.¹⁴

Torture:

Murad al-Mukhlif, a detainee in the Dammam prison, was subjected to severe physical torture, including beatings with wooden canes on his back and being bound in painful positions for long periods, which eventually caused paralysis of his legs. His family was also threatened with arrest after

¹¹ Amnesty International, "Saudi Arabia Detains Human Rights Activist Again," Oct. 14, 2011, <<http://www.amnesty.org/en/news-and-updates/saudi-arabia-detains-human-rights-activist-again-2011-10-14>>.

¹² Human Rights Watch, "Saudi Arabia: Free Islamic Scholar Who Criticized Ministry," July 14, 2011, <<http://www.hrw.org/news/2011/07/14/saudi-arabia-free-islamic-scholar-who-criticized-ministry>>.

¹³ Committee for the Defense of Human Rights in the Arabian Peninsula, "Mahkama Sa'udiya tattahim al-muhami Abu al-Khayr bi-l-mutalaba bi-malakiya dusturiya," Sep. 12, 2011, <<http://goo.gl/OaHXY>>; Amnesty International, "Saudi Activist Defiant in Face of State Intimidation," Sep. 14, 2011, <<http://www.amnesty.org/en/news-and-updates/saudi-activist-defiant-face-state-intimidation-2011-09-14>>.

¹⁴ CDHRAP, "al-Sultat al-Sa'udiya ta'taqil al-nashit al-Dubaysi al-Hajj Al Yasin," Sep. 27, 2011, <<http://goo.gl/FaSvB>>.

they demanded that the authorities investigate the torture and filed a complaint with the grievance office of the Administrative Court.¹⁵

Rights activist Mekhlef al-Shammari was also tortured in prison as punishment for filing a complaint about the conditions of his imprisonment. He was informed that he would be moved to the prison hospital for a medical examination, but he was actually taken to a room in the prison where he was restrained and beaten until he lost consciousness. An officer then poured a chemical disinfectant down his throat, which led to the deterioration of his condition and required his admittance to the prison hospital. The hospital recorded his case as an attempted suicide and placed him in solitary confinement under even more severe conditions.¹⁶

Three detainees—Fadel Ali al-Suleiman, Raed Abd al-Mohsen al-Abd al-Karim, and Mohammed Nabil al-Mohammed Saleh—were subjected to extreme sectarian abuse and torture. They were forced to confess that they had attacked a riot policeman during demonstrations in the country in March 2011. The three were among 53 demonstrators arrested at that time. They were detained until September 2011. The bones of al-Suleiman's hands were reportedly crushed due to the severity of the beatings he endured.¹⁷

Right to peaceful assembly:

Despite severe restrictions on the right to peaceful assembly and protest, protests and demonstrations increased in Saudi Arabia with the wave of democratic uprisings and protests demanding political change and socioeconomic reforms in other Arab countries.

The demonstrations began in Jeddah, in protest of government mismanagement of the floods earlier in the year. The Saudi government surrounded the demonstrators and arrested some 50 people.¹⁸ The Interior Ministry then imposed a ban on demonstrations, claiming that they violate Islamic law and stating that security forces were authorized to take all measures to prohibit attempts to undermine the regime. A statement from the

¹⁵ Alkarama, "Saudi Arabia: A Detainee Paralyzed Following Severe Acts of Torture," Aug. 5, 2011, <<http://goo.gl/CkTCC>>.

¹⁶ Alkarama, "Saudi Arabia: 56-Year-Old Human Rights Defender, Mokhlif al-Shammari, Still Illegally Detained and Tortured," Aug. 23, 2011, <<http://goo.gl/tS7Ki>>.

¹⁷ CDHRAP, "Istimrar ihtijaz thalathat muwatinin mundh masirat Maris fi-l-Ahsa," Sep. 13, 2011, <<http://goo.gl/HmH8l>>.

¹⁸ Arabian Business, "Jidda: i'tiqal al-'asharat ba'd ihtijajat ghayr masbuqa bi-sabab al-suyul," Jan. 26, 2011, <<http://arabic.arabianbusiness.com/society/politics-economics/2011/jan/28/49982/>>.

spokesman of the Interior Ministry said that existing regulations in the kingdom ban absolutely all types of demonstrations, marches, or sit-ins, as well as calls for them, as these are incompatible with the principles of Islamic law and the values and customs of Saudi society.¹⁹ The authorities also printed 1.5 million copies of a statement issued by the Council of Senior Religious Scholars declaring demonstrations in the kingdom illicit, as a means of encouraging Saudis to reject the idea of demonstrations and steer clear of them.²⁰

During the demonstrations of March 2, the authorities arrested some 220 people, about 30 of whom were still detained more than six months later.²¹ The detainees included several minors between 14-17 years of age, some of whom were detained for nearly two months.²² Demonstrators were reportedly met with tear gas and live ammunition, leading to numerous injuries among protestors, who were taken to hospitals.²³

The demonstrations, which were crushed some two months after they erupted, were able to spread to several cities, including al-Qatif, al-Ahsa, and Riyadh.²⁴ Causes promoted by these protests ranged from demands for reform to demands for the release of detainees.

On July 3, 2011, 15 women and 5 children were arrested outside the Interior Ministry building while again assembling to demand fair trials for their relatives, who had been detained without trial for long periods, some up to ten years. All but two of the women and children were released after being forced to sign a pledge not to protest again. The two remaining women—

¹⁹ BBC, “al-Sa’udiya: al-ihitijajat mamnu’ a li-annaha ‘tu’arid al-shari’a,” Mar. 5, 2011, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/arabic/middleeast/2011/03/110305_saudi_protest_ban.shtml>.

²⁰ al-Ittihad, “al-Sa’udiya tatba’ 1.5 milyun nuskha min fatwa tahrim al-tazahur,” Mar. 30, 2011, <<http://www.alittihad.ae/details.php?id=30117&y=2011>>; Asharq al-Awsat, “Hay’at kubar al-‘ulama fi-l-Sa’udiya tuharrim al-muzaharat fi-l-bilad,” Mar. 7, 2011, <<http://www.aawsat.com/details.asp?section=4&issueno=11787&article=611299>>.

²¹ CDHRAP, “Itlaq thamaniya min al-mu’taqalin ‘ala khalfiyat al-masirat al-silmiya fi-l-Qatif,” Sep. 25, 2011, <<http://goo.gl/YADec>>; BBC, “Tawqif 16 shakhsan sharaku bi-tazahur li-l-mutalaba bi-l-ifraj ‘an mu’taqalin,” Mar. 4, 2011, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/arabic/middleeast/2011/03/110304_saudi_protests.shtml>; France 24, “Tazahura fi sharq al-mamlaka ghadat i’tiqalat fi sufuf al-Shi’a,” Mar. 4, 2011, <<http://www.france24.com/ar/20110304-saudi-arabia-demonstration-hundreds-east-shiits-arrestations-anger>>.

²² CDHRAP, “Saudi Security Authorities Released Shiite Juveniles and Arrested Other Citizens,” May 23, 2011, <<http://goo.gl/Vch3Z>>.

²³ France 24, “Saudi Police Wound 3 Shiite Protestors: Witness,” Mar. 10, 2011, <<http://www.france24.com/en/20110310-saudi-police-wound-3-shiite-protesters-witness>>.

²⁴ Rasid “al-I’lan ‘an waqf al-masirat al-ihitijajiya fi-l-Qatif,” May 14, 2011, <<http://rasid108.homeip.net/artc.php?id=44352>>.

Rima Abdul Rahman al-Jareesh, a member of ACPRA, and Sharifa al-Saqabi—had both signed a petition demanding reforms in the country.²⁵

On September 24, Saudi security forces arrested seven people, including three women, after a sit-in in front of the Eastern Province Directorate to demand the release of their forgotten relatives, detained by the Interior Ministry without trial or charges since 1996 following the bombing of a US military barracks in Khobar. These Shiite detainees were released two days after their arrest.²⁶

On August 12, security forces arrested 164 Syrian nationals residing in Saudi Arabia after they organized a peaceful demonstration in Riyadh to condemn the crackdown on demonstrators in Syria.²⁷

Freedom of expression:

The Saudi authorities continued to monitor and block websites that publish material they do not like. The blog of Saudi activist Omaima al-Najjar was blocked on May 22 after she expressed her solidarity with activist Manal al-Sharif, who was arrested for driving as part of a campaign to win women the right to drive in the kingdom. On her blog, al-Najjar published a statement signed by more than 200 activists demanding the release of al-Sharif.²⁸

The website of Amnesty International was also blocked less than a week after the organization published criticisms of the proposed repressive counterterrorism law on July 22.²⁹

²⁵ Amnesty International, “Saudi Arabia Detains Women Protestors,” July 4, 2011, <<http://www.amnesty.org/en/news-and-updates/saudi-arabia-detains-women-protesters-2011-07-04>>.

²⁶ CDHRAP, “Sultat al-kayan al-Sa’udi ta’taqil ‘adad min al-sayyidat i’tasamu امام imarat al-Sharqiya,” Sep. 25, 2011, <<http://goo.gl/SFhKE>>.

²⁷ Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, “al-Marsad al-Suri yunashid al-‘ahil al-Sa’udi al-ifraj ‘an Suriyin tazaharu fi-l-Riyad,” Aug. 25, 2011, <<http://www.syriahr.com/25-8-2011-syrian%20observatory.htm>>; al-Watan Online, “I’tiqal mutazahirin Suriyin fi-l-Sa’udiya,” Aug. 25, 2011, <http://www.alwatanonline.com/policy_news.php?kind=2&id=2314>.

²⁸ ANHRI, “al-Sa’udiya: al-sultat lam tata’ allam ba’d lughat al-hiwar wa la tujid siwa al-man’ wa-l-hajb,” May 25, 2011, <<http://www.anhri.net/?p=32224>>.

²⁹ BBC, “Tasa’ud al-intiqadat li-mashru’ qanun al-irhab fi-l-Sa’udiya,” July 26, 2011, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/arabic/middleeast/2011/07/110726_saudi_terror_law.shtml>; Amnesty International, “Amnesty International Website ‘Blocked in Saudi Arabia,’” July 25, 2011, <<http://www.amnesty.org/en/news-and-updates/amnesty-international-website-%E2%80%98blocked-saudi-arabia%E2%80%99-2011-07-25>>.

The rights of many media workers and holders of dissenting opinions continued to be violated. On January 26, Syrian national Bashar Mehrez Abboud, an editor at *My Mobile* magazine, was arrested from his office in Riyadh after he published an article about a Syrian activist calling for the end of emergency law in Syria.³⁰

On March 11, Khaled al-Johani was arrested after an interview he gave with BBC³¹ in which he discussed how he felt after taking to the streets in response to the call for demonstrations and how he no longer feared the threats against demonstrators. During the interview he predicted that he would be arrested, and he was indeed detained from his home later the same day.³²

On March 15, the authorities revoked the press accreditation of journalist Ulf Laessing, a Reuters correspondent in Riyadh, which forced him to leave Saudi territory. The government claimed that Laessing's coverage of the peaceful protests in the country was inaccurate.³³ The Saudi authorities also placed an open-ended ban on three critical journalists with *al-Watan*, offering no reason for the measure. The three journalists—Amal Zahid, Aameera Khashghari, and Adwan al-Ahmari—had written about the political unrest in the region before being banned.³⁴

Sheikh Hamad al-Majed, a professor of jurisprudence at the Faculty of Islamic Law of al-Imam University, was arrested on March 23 because of an article he wrote entitled, “What if Saudis Said: The People Want the Fall of the Regime?”³⁵

Saudi security forces also arrested liberal writer Nadhir al-Majid on April 17 at his place of work and again later his home. The forces confiscated his personal computer and some personal items, although no charges have been brought against him as of the time of this writing. These measures are the result of an article he wrote on April 2 titled “I Protest, Therefore I Am,” in

³⁰ Human Rights Watch, “Saudi Arabia: Arrests for Peaceful Protest on the Rise,” Mar. 27, 2011, <<http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2011/03/27/saudi-arabia-arrests-peaceful-protest-rise>>.

³¹ Interview conducted on Mar. 11, 2011, see <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UQEIH-0WMmw>>.

³² Human Rights Watch, “Saudi Arabia: Dissident Writer Arrested,” Apr. 20, 2011, <<http://www.hrw.org/news/2011/04/20/saudi-arabia-dissident-writer-arrested>>.

³³ IFEX, “Mob Damages Press in Bahrain; Saudis Oust International Reporter,” Mar. 15, 2011, <http://www.ifex.org/bahrain/2011/03/16/al_wasat_stormed/>.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ CDHRAP, “Sultat al-kayan al-Sa’udi al-amniya ta’taqil al-shaykh Hamad al-Majid,” Mar. 28, 2011, <<http://goo.gl/fZ52R>>.

which he criticized the Saudi government's policy on demonstrators. He was detained in solitary confinement for five full months.³⁶

In late July, the Saudi authorities banned Sheikh Salman Bin Fahd al-Ouda, the deputy secretary-general of the International Union of Muslim Scholars, from leaving the kingdom after he expressed support for the Arab revolutions. Prior to that, his religious television program was banned, at which time MBC refused to continue to carry the program and the Iqra channel refused to host it under pressure from the Saudi government; when he agreed to present a program on the Egyptian Hayat channel, he was banned from travel.³⁷

In October 2011, the authorities detained Firas Baqna, Hussam al-Nasser, and Khalid al-Rasheed, the team behind YouTube video channel "Mala'ub 'alayna", after one episode of their show, aired on October 10, addressed poverty in the kingdom.³⁸

On February 16, at least five men were arrested after they attempted to receive legal recognition for the first Saudi political party. The arrest came one week after they filed an application for recognition of the Islamic Umma Party with the Royal Court and the Shura Council, despite the fact that Saudi Arabia does not permit the establishment of political parties. The arrestees included Dr. Ahmed Bin Saad al-Ghamidi, Sheikh Abd al-Aziz al-Wuhaibi, Sheikh Mohammed Bin Hussein al-Qahtani, university professor Mohammed Bin Nasser al-Ghamidi, and Walid al-Majid. They were asked to sign a pledge withdrawing their names from the party's founding document, but they refused.³⁹

Systematic discrimination against Shiites:

Shiites in the kingdom, who constitute approximately 15 percent of the Saudi population, continue to face manifold forms of systematic discrimination, particularly in obtaining employment with the government,

³⁶ HRFS, "Urgent: Immediate Freedom for the Writer and Intellectual Alsaeed Natheer Almagid," Apr. 19, 2011, <<https://acrobat.com/app.html#d=Xg0E1nx3FV6H5PzbUa4Icg>>; Reuters, "Saudi Arabia Arrests Shi'ite Writer After Protests," Apr. 19, 2011, <<http://in.reuters.com/article/2011/04/19/idINIndia-56432920110419>>; "Saudi Arabia: Dissident Writer Arrested."

³⁷ Rasid, "al-Sa'udiya tamna' al-shaykh al-'Awda min al-safar li-ta'yidihi al-thawrat al-'Arabiya," July 31, 2010, <<http://www.rasid.com/artc.php?id=45375>>.

³⁸ ANHRI, "al-Shabaka al-'Arabiya tastankir istimrar khanq hurriyat al-ta'bir fi-l-Sa'udiya," Oct. 18, 2011, <<http://www.anhri.net/?p=41827>>.

³⁹ Human Rights Watch, "Saudi Arabia: Free Political Activists," Feb. 19, 2011, <<http://www.hrw.org/news/2011/02/19/saudi-arabia-free-political-activists>>.

education, and the occupation of high-level government and security positions. The government has no Shiite ministers, and only 3 of the 150 members of the Saudi Shura Council are Shiites. Restrictions are maintained on the construction of mosques and *husseiniyat*, and the government does not allow such sites to reopen after they have been ordered to close. Shiites are prohibited from holding religious celebrations, congregating outside *husseiniyat*, and using microphones. If they do, they are subjected to assaults by the security authorities and arbitrary arrest. The growing pressure on the Shiite community at the end of the year threatened to prompt violent clashes with the authorities.

During the peaceful protests in the kingdom in 2011, particularly in the Eastern Province, the majority of those arrested were Shiites, who accounted for 150 out of 220 detainees.⁴⁰

A summary court in Qatif sentenced Shiite citizen Mohsen Ali al-Uqayli to 90 days in prison after he wrote slogans in support of the Islamic resistance in Lebanon on the windows of his car. The judge gave him the three-month sentence for writing “sectarian slogans.”⁴¹

The Saudi security authorities arrested Sheikh Tawfiq Jabir Ibrahim al-Amer on February 27 while on his way home from performing the prayer. According to his brother, al-Amer was taken to the General Intelligence Directorate. Al-Amer, a Shiite religious leader in the al-Ahsa region, had given a sermon a few days prior to his arrest advocating a constitutional monarchy for the kingdom.⁴² The authorities were forced to release al-Amer on March 6 after a wave of demonstrations swept al-Qatif and al-Ahsa in the Eastern Province,⁴³ but he was again detained on August 3 on charges of inciting public opinion, due to statements he made in a Friday sermon at a mosque in al-Hofuf.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ US Commission on International Religious Freedom, Annual Report 2011, May 2011, <<http://www.uscirf.gov/images/book%20with%20cover%20for%20web.pdf>>.

⁴¹ CDHRAP, “al-Sajin 90 yawman li-l-muwatin al-Shi’i Muhsin ‘Ali al-‘Uqayli li-kitabatihi shi’arat tumajjid al-muqawama al-Lubnaniya,” Jan. 9, 2011, <<http://goo.gl/gMzXr>>.

⁴² Rasid, “al-Sultat al-Sa’udiya tutliq sarah da’iyat huquq al-insan al-shaykh Tawfiq al-‘Amir,” Mar. 6, 2011, <<http://www.rasid.com/artc.php?id=43227>>.

⁴³ BBC, “al-Sultat al-Sa’udiya tufrij ‘an rajul din Shi’i mu’arid,” Mar. 7, 2011, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/arabic/middleeast/2011/03/110306_saudi_demo.shtml>.

⁴⁴ Amnesty International, “Shi’a Cleric Held in Saudi Arabia for ‘Inciting Public Opinion,’” Aug. 11, 2011, <<http://www.amnesty.org/en/news-and-updates/shia-cleric-held-saudi-arabia-inciting-public-opinion-2011-08-11>>.

The government also detained Shiite citizen Abdullah Mohammed al-Mabyouq on June 9, 2011. He has not been charged or tried and has been denied all visits; his fate remains unknown.⁴⁵

Clashes in the Eastern Province in October 2011 indicate the possibility of a turn to violence if the authorities continue their policy of arbitrarily arresting peaceful Shiite protestors and continue to resort to collective punishment by arresting the relatives of wanted persons. In clashes in the Shiite-majority town of al-Awwamiya on October 3 and 4, 11 security personnel and three local residents, among them two women, were injured. The clashes erupted after two elderly Shiite residents were detained to pressure their sons to turn themselves in to the police. The men are wanted in connection with the peaceful demonstrations which took place in the Eastern Province earlier in the year.⁴⁶

Discrimination against women:

Women still face legal and customary discrimination and remain subject to male custodianship in their personal lives. Women are not permitted to leave the country or receive treatment in a hospital without the approval of a male guardian.⁴⁷ Women are also prohibited from working in numerous fields and are denied many rights, particularly political rights.⁴⁸

In a departure from the norm, the Saudi monarch affirmed his rejection of the marginalization of women, announcing that Saudi women will be admitted to membership in the Shura Council starting with the assembly's next term and will be permitted to vote and run for office in future municipal elections.⁴⁹ However, women were not allowed to run for office in the municipal elections held on September 29.

⁴⁵ CDHRAP, "The Saudi Authorities Arrested the Shi'a Citizen Abdullah Mohammad al-Mabyouq," July 30, 2011, <<http://goo.gl/2Bmkz>>.

⁴⁶ Human Rights Watch, "Saudi Arabia: Stop Arbitrary Arrests of Shia," Oct. 11, 2011, <<http://www.hrw.org/news/2011/10/11/saudi-arabia-stop-arbitrary-arrests-shia>>.

⁴⁷ US Commission on International Religious Freedom, Annual Report 2011.

⁴⁸ Deutsche Welle, "al-Ibqa' 'ala iqsa' al-Sa'udiyat 'an al-musharaka fi-l-intikhabat al-baladiya," Mar. 28, 2011, <<http://www.dw-world.de/dw/article/9799/0,,14950529,00.html>>; Human Rights Watch, "Saudi Arabia: Let Women Vote, Run for Office," Mar. 31, 2011, <<http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2011/03/31/saudi-arabia-let-women-vote-run-office?print>>.

⁴⁹ Reuters, "'Ahil al-Sa'udiya yaqul inna al-nisa' sayakun lahunna dawr siyasi," Sep. 25, 2011, <<http://ara.reuters.com/article/topNews/idARACAE78O0DB20110925>>; BBC, "al-'Ahil al-Sa'udi: al-qiyada aqarrat musharakat al-mar'a fi majlis al-shura wa-l-intikhabat al-baladiya," Sep. 25, 2011, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/arabic/middleeast/2011/09/110925_saudi_king.shtml>.

Women are still denied the right to drive in Saudi Arabia. On May 22, Manal al-Sharif, a women's rights activist, was arrested while driving as part of a campaign to win the right of women to drive in the kingdom. The campaign urged women to start driving on June 17 using licenses issued in foreign countries. Although no law in the kingdom explicitly prohibits women from driving, it requires a locally issued license, which women are denied.⁵⁰

Despite these violations of women's rights and a record replete with systematic discriminatory practices against women, Saudi Arabia is a member of the body established by the UN to promote women's rights.⁵¹

Only days after King Abdullah Bin Abd al-Aziz announced that women would be permitted to vote in 2015, a Saudi court sentenced a woman to ten lashes for violating the ban on driving.⁵² The Saudi king pardoned her after rising criticism, especially given the timing of the verdict and sentence.⁵³ In addition, six Saudi girls between the ages of 12-18 were sentenced to ten lashes each after their conviction on charges of striking the director of the orphanage in which they reside.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ BBC, "al-Qabd 'ala Sa'udiya li-qiyadatiha sayyara raghm al-hazr al-mafrud," May 22, 2011, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/arabic/middleeast/2011/05/110522_saudi_driving.shtml>.

⁵¹ Asharq al-Awsat, "al-Umam al-muttahida tastab'id Iran wa takhtar al-Sa'udiya fi majlis huquq al-mar'a," Nov. 11, 2010, <<http://www.aawsat.com/details.asp?section=4&article=594806&issueno=11671>>.

⁵² BBC, "Hukm bi-l-jald 'ala imra'a Sa'udiya li-qiyadatiha al-sayyara," Sep. 27, 2011, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/arabic/middleeast/2011/09/110926_saudi_women_lashes.shtml>.

⁵³ BBC, "al-Sa'udiya: al-'afw 'an al-mar'a al-lati hukimat bi-l-jald bi-tuhmat qiyadat al-sayyara," Sep. 28, 2011, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/arabic/middleeast/2011/09/110929_saudi_women_amnesty.shtml>.

⁵⁴ Reuters, "Jald sitt fatayat Sa'udiyat li-muhajamatihunna mudirat dar al-yatimat al-lati yaqumna biha," May 10, 2011, <<http://ara.reuters.com/article/topNews/idARACAE7490PX20110510>>.

