

Saudi Arabia praised for reforms, upbraided for rights violations at UN's Universal Periodic Review



Saudi Arabia chastised on rights of women, the rights of migrant workers, religious freedom, failure to ratify the Rome Statute, International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture (OPCAT), to ratify the Convention on Enforced and Involuntary Disappearances (ICPPED), and the Convention on the Rights of Migrant Workers and All Members of Their Families (CRMW), inter alia.

By Edward Campbell

Missoula, Feb. 7 (Al-Masakin)—Although the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, being a monarchy, and therefore absolutism at its very foundation, fulfilled its democratic obligation to the international community by submitting to the much feared scrutiny of the UN Human Rights Council's Universal Periodic Review on Friday; a body currently under boycott by the United States.

The Kingdom's Zaid Al-Hussein, Vice-President of the Human Rights Commission in Saudi Arabia, noted that Saudi Arabia's main obstacle to achieving universal human rights is the of the state transformation from a tribal society, characterized by conflicts and widely dispersed and totally unconnected regions where people lived in isolation and forms of economic and

educational backwardness. The Kingdom asserted that Islam supplemented rather than detracted from the process of achieving international human rights standards.

The representative of the Kingdom asserted that the Islamic Shari'a focused special concern for the rights of vulnerable groups such as minorities and non-Muslims, but that the government of Saudi Arabia acknowledged that there were some human rights violations which primarily fell within the context of domestic violence.

The representative said that the Saudi government was constantly endeavoring to prevent these violations by promoting greater social awareness and, where necessary, imposing deterrent penalties on their perpetrators and that women's awareness of their rights has been considerably increased in recent years through the social development women's centers, and the National Society for Human



Rights which has adopted a policy of disseminating and promoting a legal

culture, in general, and women's rights, in particular.

The representative of the kingdom also said that Saudi Arabia seeks to achieve a balance between requirements of the campaign against terrorism and the need to respect human rights and that from the beginning of the terrorist problem in the Kingdom to the end of 2008, approximately \$100 million in compensation had been paid to persons

detained in terrorist cases and who were later found to be innocent.

The envoy also said that Saudi Arabia was working very seriously to combat human trafficking and that the kingdom had recently enacted the Prevention of Human Trafficking Act in order to eradicate the practice within the Kingdom.

He also noted that Saudi Arabia was in close conformity with the Paris Principles which *inter alia* mandated that a state vest an institution with the power to investigate and enforce human rights.

With respect to human rights, the delegations to the UPR noted a number of positive developments within the Kingdom. These included:

Measures taken to improve the rights of women in society; the creation of the National Human Rights Commission; the progress in the health infrastructure; progress in the right to housing and the establishment of a housing development fund; progress in immigration and labor laws; development and relief assistance efforts; its progress in the area of democratic process achieved; efforts to uphold the rights of migrant workers; the accession to international human rights instruments as regard the rights of children; the leading role played by Saudi Arabia in encouraging dialogue among civilizations; and the setting up of the National Society for Human Rights.

The Kingdom was, however, criticized for domestic violence within the kingdom, legislative inequality between men and women, inequality between boys and girls, forced marriages for women under 18, human trafficking, criminal responsibility for minors, human trafficking, failure to remunerate migrant workers, failure to

permit individuals to pursue the enforcement of their own rights and the human rights of others, failure to sign International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), failure to permit human rights organizations to enter the country, failure to ratify the Rome Statute on the International Criminal Court, and failure to effectively combat impunity.

Participating states urged Saudi Arabia to continue combating terrorism, that it end torture and corporal punishment, abolish the death penalty, amend the Code of Criminal Practice to stipulate that only individuals over 18 years old will be tried as adults, develop programs to reintegrate former prisoners into civilian life, to separate juvenile and adult prisoners, ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture (OPCAT), to ratify the Convention on Enforced and Involuntary Disappearances (ICPPED), and to intensify efforts to reintegrate and rehabilitate persons accused of terrorism.

The Kingdom was furthermore urged to reform its legislation to ensure religious freedom, to protect religious minorities, to play a leading role in the inter-faith dialogue, to end the practice of incarcerating, mistreating and applying travel bans against individuals on the basis of their religious beliefs, to enact and implement a Law of Association to guarantee the right to form civil society organizations and protect those organizations from government interference, to enable to establishment of civil society without supervision by State authorities, to ensure that any obstacles to freedom of expression and movement against human rights defenders were lifted and travel bans removed, to ratify the Convention on the Rights of Migrant Workers and All

Members of Their Families (CRMW), to establish a broad-based media campaign on the rights of migrants in Arabic and in the languages of migrants, to ensure that all rights were extended to all migrant workers, and to continue with programs to improve the economic, social and cultural rights in the country.

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