



Amman Center for Human Rights Studies statement on Saudi Arabia's Increase in Executions & Human Rights Violations in 2021

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Saudi Arabia scaled back on executions, torture, unfair trials, and human rights convictions during their G20 presidency. However, these violations have drastically increased in the first half of 2021, with 40 reported executions between January and July – already surpassing the total number of executions in 2020.

Saudi Arabia is violating freedom of expression by cracking down on dissidents, activists, and human rights defenders. Additionally, convictions and sentences based on torture-driven confessions and unfair trials are a direct violation of human rights. The use of the death penalty violates the right to life in all cases, and this increase in executions is extremely worrying.

ACHRS condemns the use of torture and unfair trials, the violation of freedom of expression, and the use of the death penalty. We call for the release of human rights defenders and activists as well as an end to these executions.

Saudi Arabia's G20 presidency saw a sharp decline both in the use of the death penalty and the prosecution of activists. However, in the first half of this year, Saudi Arabia has cracked down heavily on human rights defenders and dissidents and drastically increased executions, according to Saudi human rights groups and Amnesty International's death penalty tracking.

According to these midway reports, since Saudi Arabia handed over the G20 presidency, the state has prosecuted, sentenced, or upheld sentences from unfair trials of at least 13 people. After an 85% decrease in recorded executions in 2020, at least 40 people were executed in the first half of 2021, which is more than the total number of executions in all of 2020. Human rights groups argue that the human rights reforms and improvements seen in 2020 in Saudi Arabia were simply a PR stunt, with Amnesty International noting that "as soon as the G20 spotlight on Saudi Arabia faded, the authorities resumed their ruthless pursuit of people who dare to express their opinions freely or criticize the government."

Saudi Arabia's Specialized Criminal Court, or SCC, has greatly increased its activity this year, following the 2020 lull. The SCC re-arrested, re-sentenced, or increased sentences of human rights defenders after the G20 presidency ended, and has continued that trajectory with unfair trials and convictions based on torture. The reports released this week on the first half of 2021 show continued torture, unfair trials, unjust sentencing, and a heavy reliance on the death penalty to dissuade freedom of expression and human rights defense.

SCC convictions this year include imprisonment based on charges such as "seeking to disrupt social cohesion and weaken national unity" and "publishing a book containing suspicious views." Currently, at least 39 known activists, human rights defenders, or dissidents remain imprisoned

due to the SCC resurgence, with many others facing extended travel or speaking bans after their release.

This increase in sentences, re-arrests, travel bans, and executions is worrying and is a direct violation of international law and human rights. The use of torture to illicit confessions as well rampant unfair trials force human rights defenders to confess in fear of losing their lives. ACHRS condemns the use of the death penalty in all instances, due to its irreversibility and finality. We also condemn the Saudi government's efforts to quash freedom of expression, and stand with the activists and human rights defenders. We call on Saudi Arabia to release these individuals arrested for exercising their rights, end the use of torture and unfair trials, and end the use of the death penalty in all cases.