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No One Is Above Them a New Phase of Oppression and Torture

(Report on the Human Rights Situation in Saudi Arabia)

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1. Methodology

We have studied the forms used for documenting violations against Saudi women prepared by the “We Record” working group, and examined all patterns of violations in pursuit of identifying the Saudi authorities’ motives in carrying out these repressive practices and exploring whether the intellectual and ideological orientations of victims are influential with respect to the acts of detention, torture, and enforced disappearance, practiced against them.

The report addresses development of violations and methods of torture practiced against Saudi women, provides statistical data for every violation monitored, and presents this data to the public opinion and the Saudi community as well as the official and non-governmental organizations concerned with the human rights situation in Saudi Arabia.

2. Guidelines Manual

a- Violation geographical map

1- Prisons of al-Mabaheth (investigations police)

These prisons are run by the State Security Presidency and are dedicated to political convicts.

2- General Prisons

These prisons are run by the Ministry of Interior's Directorate of Prisons, such as Dhahban Central Prison, where many women, including activist Samar Badawi, are detained.

3- Secret Prisons

These secret State Security Presidency headquarters have been expanded since the advent of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman. They are run by the Royal Court and dedicated to the practice of torture. They are given various names, including 'House of Horror', 'Officers' Rest House', 'Hotel', and others.

4- The Specialized Criminal Court (Terror Court)

This court, located in Riyadh, has established with the aim of reprisal against dissenting opinion leaders and those who practice political, educational and religious activities that are inconsistent with the authorities' orientation.

b- Violation patterns

In this report, we have documented 15 different patterns of violations, namely:

Enforced disappearance, physical torture, arbitrary detention, psychological abuse and torture, ill-treatment, denial of medical treatment, sexual harassment, violation of privacy, forced genital exposure, solitary confinement, forced feeding, rape and murder threats, coercion of confessions, victim family violations, and defamation.

c- Definitions

1- Whip

A whip is long thin twisted piece of leather with a rigid handle used for lashing and beating victims on various parts of the body, especially the back, causing severe pain and leaving visible effects on the body of the victim for a long period of time.

2- Waterboarding

Waterboarding is a form of water torture used by security forces against victims in which water is poured over a cloth covering the face and breathing passages of an immobilized captive, causing the person to experience the sensation of drowning. Normally, water is poured intermittently to prevent death.

3. Violation Statistics

According to what we have been able to document so far, there are 145 violations against Saudi women and their families during the reign of Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, as follows:

- 15 women were subjected to enforced disappearance.
- 18 women were subjected to arbitrary detention.
- 8 women are still in custody.
- 9 women were subjected to physical torture.
- 16 women were subjected to psychological torture.
- 6 women were exposed to abuse.
- 9 women were held in solitary confinement.
- 15 women were held in illegal detention centers.
- 3 women were deprived of medical treatment.
- 6 women were subjected to sexual harassment.
- 4 women were exposed to threats and coercion.
- 15 women were deprived of visits and contacts with their relatives and lawyers.
- 13 families of victims were exposed to various violations.
- 9 women were exposed to defamation.
- Homes of 7 women were stormed by security forces.

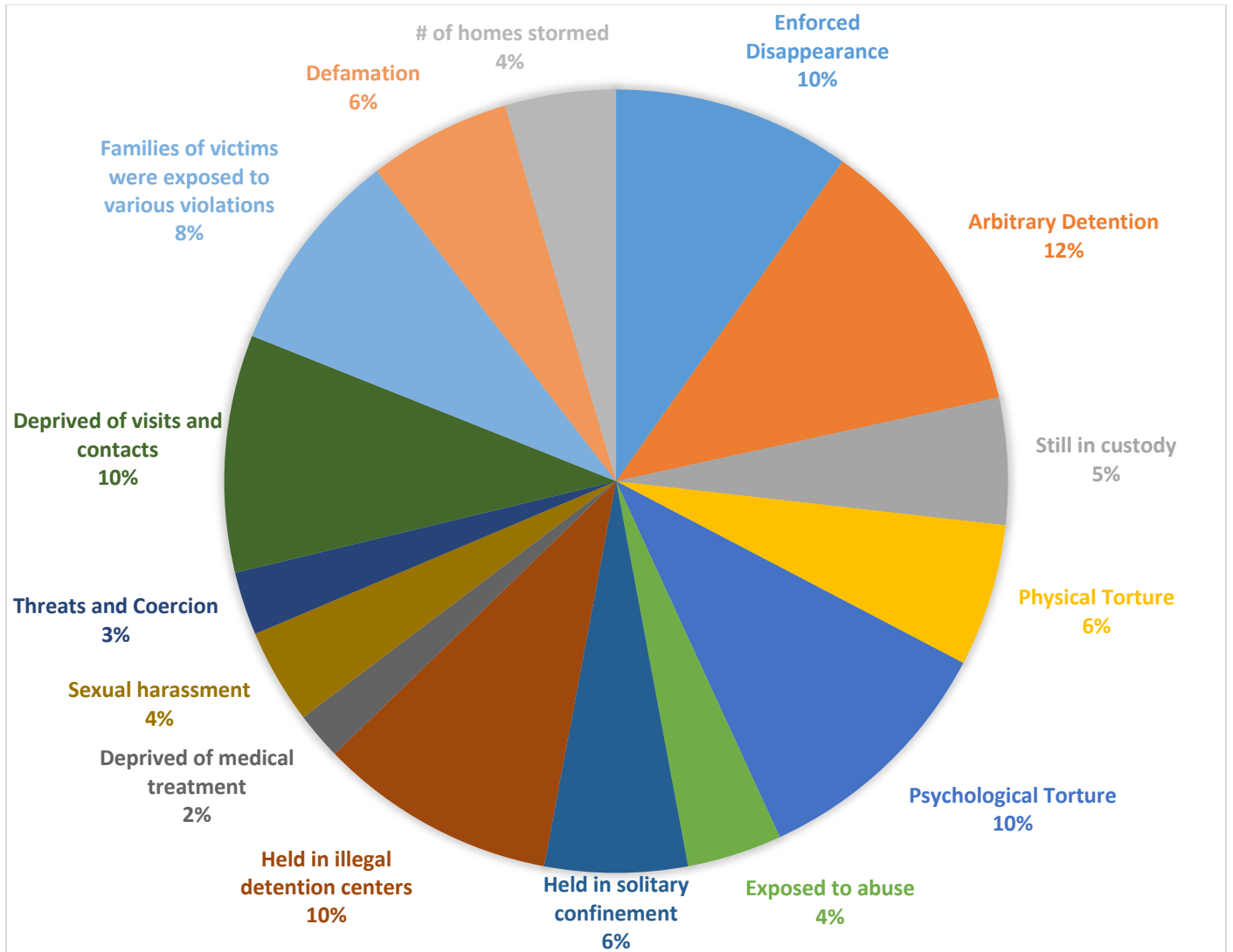


Chart: 1: Violating Statistics

4. A new era of repression

Saudi women have experienced a new and unprecedented chapter of suffering in detention centers with the access of Prince Mohammed bin Salman to power as crown prince after overthrowing his cousin former Crown Prince Mohammed bin Nayef. State institutions, media and promotion tools have since worked to introduce the new crown prince as a savior who came to empower Saudi women and enable them to restore their political, social, economic, and cultural rights. However, the truth was immediately unfolded with intensification of arrests targeting women activists.

The violations committed by Saudi authorities have not been restricted to the arrest and detention of 18 women and maintaining imprisonment of many other women that had been previously arrested during the era of former Crown Prince and Interior Minister Mohammad Bin Nayef (2 cases have been documented), but Saudi authorities have unleashed security services, especially the State Security Presidency, in repressing women detainees and exposing them to physical and psychological torture in an unprecedented way in violation of human values, rights and dignity, and in violation of Saudi regulations that are derived from the Islamic Shari'a, and also in vigorous defiance of all international laws and norms.

““violations documented by “We Record” team against women detainees in Saudi Arabia during the period from 2017 to 2019 were more severe than the violations documented during 2010 to 2014”

According to what we have been able to monitor and document, there are 15 patterns of torture used in 145 incidents, varying according to the place of detention where victims are held. Enforced disappearance, physical and psychological torture, ill-treatment, sexual harassment, threats of rape and killing, as well as other violations, are practiced in secret prisons run by the Royal Court's State Security Presidency, and newly established headquarters dedicated for the practice of torture, under supervision of Saud al-Qahtani, advisor to Mohammed bin Salman and one of his closest friends, who is also one of the defendants accused of assassinating Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi in Saudi consulate in Istanbul, Turkey.

There are detention centers scattered between Riyadh and Jeddah that have been given names like 'House of Horror', 'Officers' Rest House', 'Hotel', and others, where women detainees face the worst forms of torture and abuse. Perhaps what Saud al-Qahtani and interrogators reportedly said during one of the torture sessions of activist Loujain al-Hathloul that: **"No one is above us, not even God"**, shows how far criminal justice institutions in the Kingdom have abandoned all values, laws and Shari'a, under the auspices of the current crown prince.

This is also applicable on the prisons of al-Mabaheth (investigations police), run by the State Security Presidency, dedicated for political convicts, as well as general prisons and correctional and custodial homes run by the Interior Ministry's Prisons Directorate, where officers and other personnel follow the orders of their superiors in the practice of oppression against women prisoners and deliberately exposing them to humiliation and depriving them of their rights to medical treatment, healthy food, and human dignity, in violation of the law.

5. No One Is Above Them

The repressive measures practiced by Saudi authorities against women detainees have not been limited to a certain intellectual or political group, but they affected various currents of different orientations. Intellectual or ideological affiliation was neither a deterring factor nor an encouraging criterion in the practice of abuse against women detainees. Among the victims are university professors such as Dr. Ruqaya al-Muhareb, Dr. Aziza al-Yousef, and human rights activists such as Loujain al-Hathloul, Mia al-Zahrani, Maysa al-Amoudi, and Khadija al-Harbi, who was pregnant when she was arrested and suffered health problems and risks threatening her fetus, as well as the Shiite rights advocate Nasima Daoud al-Sadah.

All of them were subjected to arbitrary detention for long periods during which they were not prosecuted or sent to court. At least 15 women out of 20 were subjected to enforced disappearance inside secret prisons under the supervision of the State Security Presidency and the Royal Court.

At least 9 women of them were physically tortured through beating, whipping, electrocution and waterboarding in secret prisons during periods of enforced disappearance. At least 16 women were also subjected to psychological torture, and at least 6 faced humiliating and degrading treatment inside various detention facilities.

At least 15 women were placed in illegal detention centers, and at least 9 women of them were held in solitary confinement. At least six women were sexually harassed by both female jailers and male security personnel. At least

four women were threatened with killing, rape, and abuse of family members, and were forced to sign confessions on trumped-up charges.

At least 15 women have been denied visits and access to contacts with their families and lawyers. At least 13 of the families of victims have been subjected to various violations, including threats of arrest, detention as well as denial of visits to the detainee. At least seven houses were stormed for detention, in violation of the sanctity of private life.

Saudi Arabia's public prosecution agency announced on March 1, 2019 that the country's leading women's rights activists who have been detained following arrests that began in May 2018 would face charges and be put on trial (without mentioning their names). The public prosecution agency also announced that these women would be referred to the Specialized Criminal Court (the Terror Court). Later, they were transferred to the Criminal Court instead of the Specialized Criminal Court, after pressures exercised by the international community. Seven of them were temporarily released while their trial continued, and 8 women are in custody, including 5 of them that are tried in secret sessions, while 3 others are exposed to arbitrary detention without trial, namely: rights activist Samar Badawi, rights activist Nasima Daoud al-Sadah, who has been held in solitary confinement for 10 months in the investigations prison in Dammam, and physician Sheikha al-Urf, wife of detained lawyer Abdullah al-Shehry.

“We have documented that most women have been subjected to a series of violations due to their concern for human rights issues and their adoption of women's issues or intellectual and advocacy issues”

After analyzing patterns of violations committed against women detainees, the torture patterns that have recently been practiced are not new, as they had been used against detainees accused of terror-related cases before. We have been able to document that Haila Al Qaseer, a Saudi woman in her fifties, who was arrested in February 2010 as the first female detainee in Saudi prisons, was exposed to physical and psychological torture. Al Qaseer was only the first woman to be sentenced to prison. Silence towards this pattern of abuse has led to escalation of its brutality, which appeared in the detention of Saudi human rights women activists.

Haila Al Qaseer, a 51-year-old woman who was sentenced to 15 years in prison in Al-Ha'ir political prison, is considered the first female prisoner in the kingdom's prisons and the first woman to be sentenced to prison on charges of supporting terrorist organizations and groups.

Al Qaseer was subjected to enforced disappearance for two weeks and then to incommunicado detention for 30 months in harsh conditions, where her cell does not meet the minimum health and safety requirements of life. She was then subjected to many forms of degrading treatment and denial of her rights as a prisoner. She was insulted, abused, ridiculed and threatened by personnel of the Interior Ministry and the State Security Presidency, and forced to take off her hijab. Then, she was secretly tried before the Specialized Criminal Court (Terror Court) and denied her right to defend herself. The court relied on the charges filed by the police against her and in 2011 sentenced her to 15 years in prison and a travel-ban for 15 years starting after finishing her sentence in prison.

Back to the reign of Saudi Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman, activists and academics arrested in 2018 faced unprecedented patterns of abuse.

Among those that are still in custody, being under trial, is the 29-year-old human rights female activist Loujain al-Hathloul, who was arrested on 15 May 2018. Al-Hathloul suffered enforced disappearance in the secret prisons of the State Security Presidency for two months, without allowing her family to know her whereabouts, reason of her detention or ascertain her well-being. During this period, she was subjected to incommunicado detention and physical torture. She was whipped and beaten with hands and feet and was exposed to electric shocks while being interrogated by security agents who also tried to forcibly hug and kiss her, in addition to forcing her to eat during the fasting hours of the Muslims' holy month of Ramadan.

In addition to insults, threats of killing and intimidation by Saud al-Qahtani, adviser to Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman, al-Qahtani and interrogators in one of the torture sessions told al-Hathloul that: "No one is above us, not even God!" according to her sister Aliaa.

Loujain al-Hathloul, who is still suffering from the effects of torture so far, told her father that Saud al-Qahtani was delighted to see her suffering and being tortured. She was transported on a daily basis from Dhahban Prison in Jeddah to secret torture headquarters of the State Security Presidency in the same city to be tortured, before she was transferred to the Ha'ir political prison in Riyadh in mid-December 2018.

Loujain al-Hathloul's husband, Fahd al-Batiri, was also abducted from Jordan in February 2019 and forced to divorce his wife; while her father was threatened with arrest and killing his daughter if he did not remove a tweet he wrote on Twitter against the injustices his daughter was exposed to.

The ultimate target of the torture Loujain al-Hathloul was exposed to was to force her to sign confessions of crimes she did not commit and also to sign an appeal to pardon her.

After the enforced disappearance period, she was harassed by the authorities regarding contacting her family, where she was allowed only one visit and two phone calls per month, in violation of the Saudi law that provided for the right of the prisoner to one visit a week. Al-Hathloul, is now tried before the Specialized Criminal Court (Terror Court) in Riyadh, along with other activists, where trial sessions are held secretly.

[Samar Badawi](#) is one of the arbitrarily detained Saudi women although she has a double nationality. Badawi, a Saudi/Canadian human rights activist, was arrested on July 30, 2018, after storming her home late at night and terrorizing her and her 4-year-old female child, Joud Walid Abul-Khair. From the early moments of her detention, Samar was subjected to ill-treatment and forced to stand in the street carrying her little child on her arm for several hours. She was then subjected to enforced disappearance inside secret headquarters of the State Security Presidency, where she was physically tortured, beaten and electrocuted. She was exposed to waterboarding, sexual harassment, insult and ridicule, and was forced to sign confessions for crimes she did not commit. After that, she was transferred to the Dhahban Central Prison in Jeddah, where she

was placed in solitary confinement, denied her rights as a prisoner and deliberately humiliated and degraded with the aim of diminishing her dignity.

More than a year has passed since she was arbitrarily detained without being brought before the prosecution or sent to trial.

Human rights activist Nasima Daoud al-Sadah has been placed in solitary confinement for 300 days so far, as she was arrested on July 30, 2018 by the State Security Presidency forces. She was then subjected to enforced disappearance for a month during which her family could not know her whereabouts or check on her.

Media outlets and writers close to Saudi authorities launched defamation campaigns against al-Sadah and accused her of communicating with the State of Qatar and the Islamic Republic of Iran. In this regard, pro-regime journalist Abdul Rahman Al-Rashed on March 7, 2019 published an article on the Arab News, an electronic website, with the aim of defaming the victim. However, the website was prompted to remove the victim's image under the pressure of the angry reaction of bloggers on the social networking sites.

Nasima Daoud al-Sadah is still held in Al-Mabahith (Investigations) Prison in Dammam, suffering from poor conditions and treatment. She has been placed in solitary confinement without being brought before the prosecution or sent to trial although more than a year has passed since she was arrested.

It is clear from the above data that patterns of violations against Saudi women went through two stages:

- The first stage included subjecting victims to verbal abuse, ill-treatment and placement in solitary confinement in premises not suitable for human use. An example for this was Haila Al-Qaseer, who was exposed to various types of psychological torture and ill-treatment, as explained above.
- The second phase has been more brutal and dangerous in terms of the negative psychological and physical impact on victims, where they were exposed to various types of torture, including whipping, beating with hands and legs, sexual harassment and waterboarding.

In fact, the international community's silence on the human rights violations that had been committed by Saudi authorities during the first stage has encouraged authorities to maintain and escalate the practice of torture against Saudi women, being assured that these violations will go unpunished amid impunity of security forces.

The Saudi authorities' motives behind involvement in all these violations that have exceeded all ethical, religious and legal lines, include:

- For fear of a growing rights-oriented mobilization within the Kingdom, that may lead to demands related to political reform and popular participation in governance.
- To punish human rights activists for their awareness-raising activities targeting the Saudi community.
- To create a state of general deterrence of Saudi citizens and threatening them with a similar fate in case of claiming rights or following the footsteps of the victims.

6. Conclusion

In accordance with the provisions of the Basic Law of Governance, which is the Constitution of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and based on the Imprisonment and Detention Law issued by Royal Decree No. M/31 on 25 May 1978, and the Cabinet Decision No. 441/1398 and the Code of Criminal Procedure, and based on international laws and norms, especially Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), we call on the Saudi authorities to:

- 1- Release all prisoners of conscience immediately.
- 2- Allow re-trial of all women who have been convicted of intellectual or political offenses. If there is likely evidence of guilt, they must be tried by a natural judge under procedures guaranteeing their rights to litigation, as well as independence and impartiality of the court and all guarantees of a fair trial.
- 3- Promptly start investigations on all violations committed against women in detention centers and bring perpetrators to trial.

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