

HRC42 joint statement on Saudi Arabia

Item 8, 23 September 2019

I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of a group of states and my own country, Australia.

Before I begin, we wish to express our condemnation of the reckless attacks on Saudi Arabian oil facilities on 14 September. The deliberate targeting of civilian infrastructure is against international humanitarian law.

Mr President

The Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action emphasises that it is the duty of States to promote and protect all human rights and fundamental freedoms, regardless of their political, economic and cultural systems. It expresses grave concern at continuing human rights violations in all parts of the world.

We welcome recent reforms in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, including the announcement in August that restrictions on the rights of women to travel will be lifted and that they can be the legal guardian of children. These changes follow other reforms on women's employment and education. We acknowledge the spirit of modernisation and reform embodied by the Saudi Vision 2030.

However, we remain deeply concerned at the human rights situation in Saudi Arabia. Civil society actors in Saudi Arabia still face persecution and intimidation. Human rights defenders, women's rights activists, journalists and dissidents remain in detention, or under threat. We are concerned at reports of torture, arbitrary detention, enforced disappearances, unfair trials, and harassment of individuals engaged in promoting and defending human rights, their families and colleagues.

Over the last year, this Council has given serious consideration to the murder of Mr Jamal Khashoggi in October 2018 at Saudi Arabia's Consulate in Istanbul. It is important that truth be established and accountability be achieved, both for Mr Khashoggi's loved ones and to ensure the principles of the VDPA are respected. We acknowledge the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial killings, summary or arbitrary executions for her detailed and important investigation into this matter.

In line with its obligations as a HRC member and the standards articulated by the VDPA, we urge Saudi Arabia to uphold the highest standards in the promotion and protection of human rights and fully cooperate with the Council, including by accepting visits by relevant Special Procedures Mandate Holders.

We urge Saudi Arabia to redouble its human rights reform efforts; we encourage Saudi Arabia to ratify the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; we call for an end to impunity for torture and extrajudicial killings; and we appeal to Saudi Arabia to end its use of the death penalty.