

We are deeply concerned by the legal framework, which lacks basic rights protections and severely restricts freedoms of association, peaceful assembly and expression, and particularly the continued misuse of the overly broad and vague Counter-Terrorism Law of 2017 and the Cybercrime Law of 2007 to clamp down on human rights and peaceful activists. We are further alarmed by the continued judicial persecution of HRDs, including women HRDs (WHRDs), who face additional systemic barriers and challenges such as sexual harassment as they advocate for gender equality and the rights of women.

KEY CONCERNS



FREEDOM OF PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY

Saudi Arabia's Basic Law and its legal framework in general do not expressly provide for or protect freedom of peaceful assembly.

The authorities categorically prohibit political protests and unauthorised assemblies which carry severe punishment, including the death penalty.

The 2017 Counter-Terrorism Law and 2007 Cybercrime Law are used to criminalise assemblies, which are often interpreted as acts deemed to 'disturb the public order'.



FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

Criticism of the country's grand mufti, the Council of Senior Religious Scholars and government officials, is criminalised by a 2011 Royal Decree amending the Press and Publications Law.

The government exercises significant control over the content of domestic media and exerts significant influence over regional print and satellite television coverage, and extensively regulates and undertakes surveillance of social media.

The authorities use the broad and vaguely worded Cybercrime Law to restrict online sharing of information perceived to be critical.

Surveillance is extensive, the government is known to have purchased Pegasus spyware, which allows users to secretly hack into a target's phone and spy on their location and communications in real time.



FREEDOM OF ASSOCIATION

Those wishing to register new associations face serious impediments, the founders must fulfil several requirements, including a minimum of 10 Saudi national founding members, and a requirement to deposit 5 million Saudi riyals (approx. US\$1.3 million) into the organisation's bank account within the first year of operation.

Organisations have been denied licences, sometimes through arbitrary delays, and the law is silent on whether organisations may begin operations if the Ministry of Labour and Social Development (MSLD) has failed to issue a licence after 60 days have elapsed.

Upon registration, the law grants the MSLD extensive oversight powers over the internal affairs of organisations, with MSLD officials having the right to attend board meetings at which voting occurs and the right to suspend or disband an organisation.

COMMON VIOLATIONS AGAINST HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS INCLUDE:

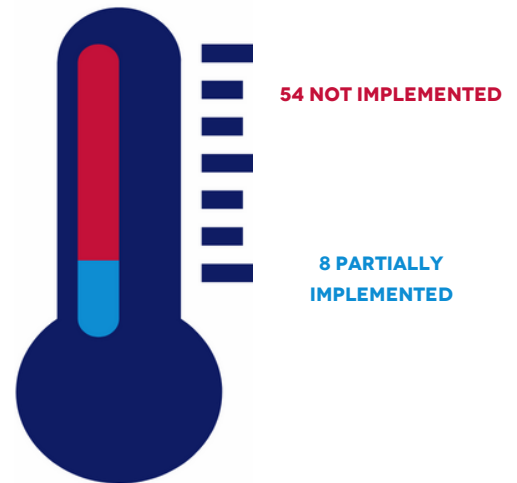
Extremely long sentences
and the death penalty

Recurring cases of
enforced disappearance

Continued detention beyond
the expiry of prison sentences

PREVIOUS UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEW PROCESS

Saudi Arabia received 52 recommendations
relating to the space for civil society (civic space).



RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1 Amend the Law on Associations and Foundations to remove undue restrictions on the registration of associations.
- 2 Provide civil society members, HRDs and journalists with a safe and secure environment in which to carry out their work, conduct impartial, thorough and effective investigations into all cases of attacks, harassment and intimidation against them and bring the perpetrators of such offences to justice.
- 3 Amend the 2003 Press and Publication Law, 2007 Cybercrime Law and 2017 Counter-Terrorism Law to enshrine protections for free and peaceful expression and dissent.
- 4 Promulgate a law granting residents the right to peaceful assembly.
- 5 Immediately and unconditionally release all HRDs, including journalists and bloggers detained for exercising their fundamental rights to freedoms of association, peaceful assembly and expression, and review their cases to prevent further harassment.

Civic space in Saudi Arabia is currently rated “**CLOSED**” by the CIVICUS Monitor