

STATEMENT UNDER AGENDA ITEM 2:
INTERACTIVE DIALOGUE WITH THE HIGH COMMISSIONER
40TH SESSION OF THE UN HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL
DELIVERED BY H.E. HARALD ASPELUND (ICELAND)
07 MARCH 2019

Mr. President,

I have the honor to read this statement on behalf of a number of States.

While acknowledging the spirit of modernization and reform embodied by the Saudi Vision 2030, we express significant concerns about reports of continuing arrests and arbitrary detentions of human rights defenders in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, including women's rights activists.

We are particularly concerned about the use of the counter-terrorism law and other national security provisions against individuals peacefully exercising their rights and freedoms. Human rights defenders and civil society groups can and should play a vital role in the process of reform which the Kingdom is pursuing.

We join the High Commissioner and Special Rapporteurs in their calls upon the Saudi authorities to release all individuals, including Loujain al-Hathloul, Eman al-Nafjan, Aziza al-Yousef, Nassima al-Sadah, Samar Badawi, Nouf Abdelaziz, Hatoon al-Fassi, Mohammed Al-Bajadi, Amal Al-Harbi and Shadan al-Anezi, detained for exercising their fundamental freedoms.

We condemn in the strongest possible terms the killing of journalist Jamal Khashoggi, which Saudi Arabia has confirmed took place in its consulate in Istanbul. The circumstances of Mr. Khashoggi's death reaffirm the need to protect journalists and to uphold the right to freedom of expression around the world. Investigations into the killing must be prompt; effective and thorough; independent and impartial; and transparent. Those responsible must be held to account.

We call upon Saudi Arabia to disclose all information available and to fully cooperate with all investigations into the killing, including the human rights inquiry by the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions.

Finally, we call on Saudi Arabia to take meaningful steps to ensure that all members of the public, including human rights defenders and journalists, can freely and fully exercise their rights to freedoms of expression, opinion and association, including online, without fear of reprisals.

I thank you, Mr. President.

List of countries supporting the Joint Statement:

Australia, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, Croatia, Czech Republic, Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Monaco, Montenegro, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom.