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fidh

International Federation
for Human Rights

Fédération Internationale des
Ligues des Droits de l'Homme

Federación Internacional
de Derechos Humanos

Международная Федерация
за права человека

الفدرالية الدولية لحقوق الإنسان

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Date: 21 September 2015

HRC section: 30th Session (Agenda Item 4, General Debate)

Speaker: Vani Selvarajah

Oral Statement to the 30th Session of the UN Human Rights Council Regular Session - Oral Statement Item 4: General Debate

Lawyers for Lawyers (L4L), Lawyers' Rights Watch Canada (LRWC), The International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) and the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT), non-governmental organizations in special consultative status

Mr. President,

United Nations General Assembly resolution 60/251 reaffirmed the Vienna Declaration and decided that members of the Human Rights Council shall uphold the highest standards in the promotion and protection of human rights. Some of the Council's current members, including Saudi Arabia, have persistently failed to do so, threatening the integrity of the UN human rights system. Human rights defenders in Saudi Arabia continue to face severe punishments including prison terms and flogging for peacefully exercising protected rights. A large number of prominent human rights defenders have been sentenced to prison on the basis of illegitimate charges and unfair trials. Amongst them are at least [4] lawyers.

Lawyer Waleed Abu al-Khair was sentenced to 15 years imprisonment on charges of, amongst others, "striving to overthrow the state and the authority of the King" by calling for a constitutional monarchy, and "criticising and insulting the judiciary". Al-Khair has represented many victims of human rights violations. Amongst his former clients is Raif Badawi, a blogger who was sentenced to ten years in prison and 1,000 lashes.

Abdulrahman Al- Subaihi, Bander Alnogaithan and Abdulrahman Al- Rumaih advocated for the independence of the judiciary, through the use of social media platforms. These three lawyers were sentenced to prison sentences variation from 5-8 years on charges including "insulting the judiciary" and "prejudicing public order" via Twitter.

- We call on members and observers of the Council to act to preserve its integrity by condemning, in their individual statements and collectively, the gross, widespread and systematic violations of human rights committed in Saudi Arabia and by reminding the authorities of the country, including in plenary meetings, of their human rights obligations as a member of the international community and of the Council. Failing to do so, they will embolden enemies of strong, credible international bodies and mechanisms to promote and protect human rights. Time has come for individual and collective responses to Saudi Arabia's appalling human rights record and behavior, which make a mockery of its obligations as a Council member.

Thank you.