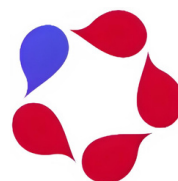


2024

HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT

Saudi Arabia

Prepared By:



**Washington Center
For Human Rights**

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Executive Summary

In 2024, the human rights situation in Saudi Arabia reveals a complex landscape marked by ongoing violations and some notable improvements. Key findings include:

Significant human rights violations persist, particularly concerning freedom of expression and political repression. The Saudi government continues to suppress dissent through arbitrary arrests, detention of activists, and censorship of independent media. Individuals who criticize the government or advocate for human rights face severe consequences, including lengthy prison sentences and harsh treatment. The use of anti-terrorism laws to target critics remains a critical concern.

On the other hand, there have been limited improvements in certain areas. The Saudi authorities have introduced some legal reforms aimed at enhancing women's rights, such as allowing women to drive and increasing their participation in the workforce. Additionally, there have been modest changes in labor laws, including improved conditions for domestic workers. These steps represent incremental progress but fall short of addressing the broader systemic issues.

Recommendations for Saudi Arabia include urgent reforms to ensure the protection of freedom of expression and political dissent. The government is urged to release prisoners of conscience, cease the use of repressive laws against activists, and ensure fair trials. Furthermore, there is a need for comprehensive reforms to protect labor rights and to address issues related to gender equality and civil liberties. International pressure and support for these reforms are crucial in fostering a more inclusive and rights-respecting environment.

Key Human Rights Issues in Saudi Arabia During 2024

Severe Violations

1. Women's Rights:

The Personal Status Law, introduced in 2022, reinforces male guardianship, significantly limiting women's autonomy in areas such as marriage and child custody. This system perpetuates discrimination and facilitates domestic violence. Women's rights activists face arbitrary detention and travel bans[1][4].

2. Freedom of Expression:

Saudi Arabia has intensified its crackdown on dissent, with numerous activists and intellectuals imprisoned for expressing their views. The Specialized Criminal Court has handed down severe penalties, including death sentences for online activities, underscoring the suppression of free speech[4][5].

3. Death Penalty:

The use of the death penalty remains severe, with 196 executions reported in 2022, including mass executions. Trials often lack fairness and transparency, and non-violent offenses are frequently punishable by death[2][5].

4. Migrant Rights:

Migrants face significant abuses, including arbitrary arrests and labor exploitation. Over 468,000 foreign nationals were deported in 2023, often without due process, and many migrants face conditions comparable to human trafficking[2][5].

5. Violence Against Migrants:

Saudi border guards have been implicated in the deaths of Ethiopian migrants attempting to enter the country, using explosive weapons and shooting at close range, resulting in hundreds of fatalities[1][2].

Progress Made

Despite severe issues, there have been small steps towards dialogue, particularly with the European Union, showing a limited willingness to address human rights concerns. However, these discussions have yet to lead to substantive reforms[2][4].

Ongoing Concerns

1. Judicial Independence:

The judiciary remains under royal control, with trials lacking transparency and fairness. Human rights defenders face ongoing harassment and travel bans even after release[2][5].

2. Environmental Rights:

As a leading fossil fuel producer, Saudi Arabia's environmental policies raise concerns about the impact of climate change on vulnerable populations, highlighting inadequate environmental protections[1][2].

3. Digital Surveillance:

The use of technology for monitoring and suppressing dissent threatens privacy and freedom of expression. New data protection laws grant extensive powers to state agencies[1][2].

Recommendations

For the Saudi Government:

Abolish male guardianship, ensure fair trials, and cease the use of the death penalty for non-violent crimes. Improve protections for migrants and provide legal recourse for abuse victims.

For International Bodies:

Apply pressure for adherence to international human rights standards, especially concerning freedom of expression and treatment of women and migrants. Advocate for judicial transparency.

For Civil Society Organizations:

Support human rights defenders and women's rights activists facing persecution. Raise awareness about migrant rights and advocate for comprehensive labor rights reforms. In summary, while there is some engagement in human rights dialogue, the situation in Saudi Arabia remains severe, with ongoing significant violations and minimal progress.

Citations:

- [1] <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2024/country-chapters/saudi-arabia>
- [2] <https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/middle-east-and-north-africa/middle-east/saudi-arabia/report-saudi-arabia/>
- [3] <https://freedomhouse.org/country/saudi-arabia/freedom-world/2024>
- [4] <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/05/16/japan-press-saudi-arabia-human-rights>
- [5] <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/saudi-arabia-human-rights-raif-badawi-king-salman>

Methodology

Sources of Information

1. Interviews:

Data collection included interviews with human rights defenders, victims of abuse, and their families. These personal testimonies offered direct insights into the human rights situation, capturing individual experiences of repression and discrimination.

2. Field Research:

Researchers conducted field visits to observe conditions and practices directly. This approach provided qualitative data on the impact of government policies and the lived experiences of affected communities.

3. Reports from Local NGOs:

Reports from local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) were utilized to gather detailed information on human rights abuses. These organizations often provide crucial insights despite facing restrictions and risks from the government[1][4].

4. International Organizations:

Information was drawn from assessments and recommendations by international bodies, including the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) and Amnesty International. These sources offer evaluations of Saudi Arabia's adherence to international human rights standards[2][5].

5. Media Reports:

Reputable media outlets were reviewed to cross-check information and provide context for the findings. Media coverage helped to corroborate and supplement data collected from interviews and reports.

Data Collection Methods

Qualitative Analysis:

The report emphasized qualitative data through personal narratives and testimonies, which were essential for understanding the depth and nuances of human rights violations.

Quantitative Data:

Statistical data, such as execution rates and the number of arrests, was included to provide a broader context and support qualitative findings.

Document Review:

Legal documents, government statements, and policy papers were reviewed to analyze the regulatory framework governing human rights in Saudi Arabia.

Limitations and Challenges

1. Access Restrictions:

The Saudi government imposes severe restrictions on access to information, particularly regarding sensitive human rights issues. This limited researchers' ability to gather comprehensive data and verify information[3][4].

2. Safety Concerns:

Conducting interviews and field research involved significant safety risks for both researchers and informants. Many individuals were hesitant to share their experiences due to fear of government retaliation.

3. Reliability of Sources:

The credibility of some local NGOs can be affected by governmental pressure and oversight, potentially compromising the reliability of their reports[1][4].

4. Cultural Sensitivity:

Researchers had to navigate cultural and societal norms carefully to engage effectively and respectfully with communities, ensuring that the research approach was sensitive to local contexts.

Overall, the methodology for the 2024 human rights report on Saudi Arabia combined multiple data sources and methods to provide a comprehensive overview of the human rights situation, despite facing numerous challenges in a highly controlled environment.

Citations:

- [1] <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2024/country-chapters/saudi-arabia>
- [2] <https://freedomhouse.org/country/saudi-arabia/freedom-world/2024>
- [3] <https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-report/SAU>
- [4] <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2024/01/saudi-arabia-authorities-must-abide-by-recommendations-from-un-human-rights-council-review/>
- [5] <https://www.ohchr.org/en/countries/saudi-arabia>

Human Rights Overview

Political Context

Saudi Arabia's absolute monarchy remains highly restrictive regarding political freedoms and civil liberties. Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MBS) continues to exert significant influence, with an intensified crackdown on dissent. Human rights activists, intellectuals, and critics face severe reprisals, including long prison sentences and death penalties. For instance, a retired teacher received a death sentence in July 2023 for social media activities, highlighting the regime's harsh stance on free expression[1][4].

The judiciary lacks independence and transparency, with trials often described as unfair. Prominent activists, such as Loujain al-Hathloul, are under constant threat of re-incarceration, reflecting ongoing repression of peaceful activism and human rights advocacy[1][4][5].

Economic Context

Saudi Arabia's economy relies heavily on migrant labor, which constitutes about 42% of the population. Migrant workers frequently face exploitation, including wage theft and human trafficking. Many are unable to change jobs or leave the country due to confiscated passports and inadequate legal protections[2][5].

Despite efforts to diversify the economy through Vision 2030, aimed at reducing dependence on oil, these initiatives have not led to substantial improvements in human rights. The regime has invested heavily in sports and entertainment to enhance its international image, a strategy known as "sportswashing," while continuing to suppress human rights[1][4].

Social Context

Social conditions for women and minorities remain challenging. Reforms such as the Personal Status Law have reinforced male guardianship and patriarchal structures, limiting women's autonomy in key areas like marriage and custody[1][4].

The treatment of migrants, particularly those from Ethiopia and Yemen, has drawn severe international criticism. Reports indicate that Saudi border guards have killed hundreds of migrants attempting to enter the country, raising serious concerns about potential crimes against humanity[1][3].

Significant Events

In 2024, Saudi Arabia faced increased scrutiny during its Universal Periodic Review by the United Nations Human Rights Council, with significant calls for reforms in women's rights and the treatment of activists[4]. Additionally, the Saudi-led coalition's role in the Yemen conflict continues to be controversial, with ongoing allegations of war crimes and human rights violations[1][3].

Overall, the human rights situation in Saudi Arabia in 2024 is marked by severe repression and limited progress. The political, economic, and social contexts contribute to a challenging environment for human rights, with ongoing international condemnation and calls for reform.

Citations:

- [1] <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2024/country-chapters/saudi-arabia>
- [2] <https://freedomhouse.org/country/saudi-arabia/freedom-world/2024>
- [3] <https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/middle-east-and-north-africa/middle-east/saudi-arabia/report-saudi-arabia/>
- [4] <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/05/16/japan-press-saudi-arabia-human-rights>
- [5] <https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/middle-east-and-north-africa/middle-east/saudi-arabia/>

Civil and Political Rights

Freedom of Expression and Assembly

In 2024, Saudi Arabia's suppression of freedom of expression and assembly has intensified. The regime continues to target individuals for peacefully expressing dissenting views. Notable cases include Muhammad al-Ghamdi, a retired teacher who was sentenced to death for critical social media posts and videos[2][4]. Activists such as Loujain al-Hathloul face ongoing restrictions and threats of re-arrest for their advocacy[4][5]. The government employs broad, vaguely defined laws to criminalize online dissent, leading to numerous arbitrary arrests[2][5].

Arbitrary Arrests

Arbitrary arrests remain a widespread issue. For example, Hassan Al Rabea was extradited from Morocco to Saudi Arabia, where he faces serious risks of arbitrary detention and torture[2]. Individuals associated with human rights organizations or those critical of the government are frequently targeted under counterterrorism laws. Trials often lack transparency and fairness, with the Specialized Criminal Court frequently criticized for relying on forced confessions and failing to meet international legal standards[2][5].

Torture and Ill-Treatment

Torture and ill-treatment in detention facilities are significant concerns. Reports indicate that detainees, including those accused of nonviolent offenses, are subjected to torture to extract confessions. Hussein Abu al-Khair, for example, was executed for a nonviolent drug crime despite claiming his confession was obtained under duress[2][5]. Women in detention face additional abuse, including sexual violence and psychological torture. The male guardianship laws further exacerbate their vulnerability, as women are heavily dependent on male relatives for legal and personal matters[4][5].

Government Responses and International Pressure

The Saudi government has consistently denied allegations of human rights abuses, framing its actions as essential for national security. Despite this, international pressure has mounted. Diplomatic engagements, such as those with Japan, have included calls for improvements in human rights[4]. The United Nations Human Rights Council has urged reforms and the ratification of international human rights treaties, but these calls have yet to lead to meaningful changes[4].

Overall Impact on the Population

The impact of these policies on the Saudi population is profound. Citizens live under constant fear of reprisal for expressing dissent or participating in peaceful assembly. This pervasive atmosphere of repression stifles public discourse and civil society, leaving

individuals feeling powerless. Marginalized groups, including women and migrant workers, face systemic discrimination and abuse, lacking adequate legal protections[1][3][5].

In summary, the civil and political rights situation in Saudi Arabia in 2024 is marked by severe repression. The government's extensive measures to control dissent and maintain authority continue to result in widespread human rights violations, with little meaningful change in response to international pressure.

Citations:

- [1] <https://freedomhouse.org/country/saudi-arabia/freedom-world/2024>
- [2] <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2024/country-chapters/saudi-arabia>
- [3] <https://freedomhouse.org/country/saudi-arabia>
- [4] <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/05/16/japan-press-saudi-arabia-human-rights>
- [5] <https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/middle-east-and-north-africa/middle-east/saudi-arabia/report-saudi-arabia/>

Rights of Specific Groups

Women's Rights

In 2024, women's rights in Saudi Arabia remain critically constrained despite some legal reforms. The Personal Status Law, enacted in 2022, reinforces male guardianship, requiring women to seek approval from male guardians for marriage and significantly restricting their autonomy in matters of divorce and child custody[1][5]. This legal framework continues to facilitate discrimination and domestic violence against women.

Women activists are still targeted by the regime. Prominent figures like Loujain al-Hathloul, who had previously been imprisoned for their activism, remain under travel bans and face ongoing restrictions[2][5]. Although there have been some reforms, such as allowing women to drive and enter public spaces unaccompanied, these changes are limited in scope and do not address the fundamental issues of gender inequality.

Children's Rights

Children's rights in Saudi Arabia face significant challenges, particularly concerning judicial practices. While the government claims to prohibit the death penalty for crimes committed as minors, exceptions exist under **qisas** (retributive justice) and **hudud** laws, which can impose severe penalties, including corporal punishment and even execution[1][2]. Reports of harsh sentences for juvenile offenders raise serious human rights concerns, highlighting the need for reform in juvenile justice practices.

LGBTQ+ Rights

LGBTQ+ individuals in Saudi Arabia experience severe discrimination and legal repercussions. The country lacks specific laws protecting LGBTQ+ rights, and same-sex relations are criminalized under anti-cybercrime laws and Islamic principles. This legal environment fosters a climate of fear and repression, with reports of arbitrary detentions, harsh penalties, and torture for those identified as LGBTQ+[1][2]. The absence of legal protections and societal acceptance contributes to widespread human rights abuses against LGBTQ+ individuals.

Ethnic and Religious Minorities

Ethnic and religious minorities, particularly Shia Muslims, face systemic discrimination and repression. Shia communities, concentrated in the Eastern Province, experience arbitrary detention, unfair trials, and harsh penalties, often related to political dissent or allegations of terrorism[2][3]. The Saudi government's policies and practices have been criticized for exacerbating sectarian tensions and violating the rights of religious minorities.

Migrant Workers

Migrant workers in Saudi Arabia, who make up a significant portion of the labor force, face severe exploitation and abuse. Reports document widespread issues such as wage theft, poor working conditions, and human trafficking. Migrants from countries like Ethiopia and Yemen are particularly vulnerable, facing violence at the border and arbitrary deportations[1][2]. Instances of migrant workers being killed while attempting to cross into Saudi Arabia highlight the extreme risks they face[5].

Conclusion

In summary, Saudi Arabia's human rights conditions in 2024 present significant challenges across various groups. Women continue to face legal and social restrictions despite some reforms. Children's rights are compromised by harsh judicial practices, while LGBTQ+ individuals endure severe repression and legal risks. Ethnic and religious minorities, particularly Shia Muslims, experience systemic discrimination and persecution. Migrant workers face dire conditions, marked by exploitation and violence. Continued international scrutiny and pressure are essential for advancing human rights in Saudi Arabia.

Citations:

- [1] <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2024/country-chapters/saudi-arabia>
- [2] <https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/middle-east-and-north-africa/middle-east/saudi-arabia/report-saudi-arabia/>
- [3] <https://freedomhouse.org/country/saudi-arabia/freedom-world/2024>
- [4] <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/01/saudi-arabias-human-rights-record-be-examined-universal-periodic-review>
- [5] <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/05/16/japan-press-saudi-arabia-human-rights>

Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights

In 2024, Saudi Arabia's approach to economic, social, and cultural rights, particularly concerning health, education, and housing, reflects a blend of notable advancements and persistent challenges. Here's an analysis of the current situation:

Right to Health Improvements:

Healthcare Infrastructure: Saudi Arabia has made substantial investments in expanding and modernizing healthcare facilities, including the promotion of preventive care and the establishment of new medical centers.

Vision 2030 Initiatives: These initiatives aim to enhance the healthcare system and provide better services to the population.

Challenges:

Rural Disparities:

Access to quality healthcare remains uneven, with rural areas often underserved compared to urban centers.

Cost and Insurance:

High healthcare costs and inadequate insurance coverage for all citizens continue to be significant barriers.

Expatriate Workers:

The healthcare system heavily relies on expatriate workers, who often face poor working conditions and exploitation, impacting the quality of care.

Right to Education Improvements:

Increased Opportunities for Women:

There has been progress in expanding educational opportunities for women, aligning with Vision 2030's focus on women's empowerment and workforce participation.

Educational Reforms:

Efforts are underway to improve educational quality and access, with more emphasis on higher education and vocational training.

Challenges:

Societal Barriers:

Societal expectations and remnants of male guardianship laws continue to limit women's and girls' full participation in education.

Regional Disparities:

Educational resources and facilities vary significantly between urban and rural areas, affecting the quality of education.

Curriculum Limitations:

The curriculum often lacks focus on critical thinking and civic education, which are crucial for developing an informed citizenry.

Right to Adequate Housing Improvements:

Government Housing Projects: The government has launched several initiatives to provide affordable housing, especially for low-income families, as part of Vision 2030's goals.

Challenges:

Housing Quality:

Many citizens, particularly in rapidly urbanizing areas, live in substandard housing conditions. High property prices and limited access to financing exacerbate the housing crisis.

Migrant Workers:

Migrant workers, a significant portion of the population, face poor housing conditions, including overcrowding and inadequate safety standards. The lack of legal protections for these workers highlights the need for comprehensive reforms.

Barriers and Areas for Improvement

Repression of Dissent:

The government's restriction on dissent and civil society limits advocacy efforts for better rights and services, impacting women and marginalized groups.

Gender Discrimination:

Systemic discrimination against women persists, affecting their access to health, education, and housing despite some recent reforms.

Migrant Worker Rights:

Exploitation of migrant workers remains a critical issue, with many facing harsh living and working conditions without adequate legal protections.

In conclusion, while Saudi Arabia has made progress in improving economic, social, and cultural rights, particularly through Vision 2030, significant challenges remain. Addressing these issues, especially in terms of healthcare access, educational equity, and housing conditions, will be crucial for ensuring more equitable and comprehensive rights for all citizens.

Citations:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_Covenant_on_Economic,_Social_and_Cultural_Rights

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<https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/05/16/japan-press-saudi-arabia-human-rights>

Refugees and Migrants

The situation for refugees, asylum seekers, and migrant workers in Saudi Arabia during 2024 remains dire, marked by systemic abuses, exploitation, and inadequate protections.

Living Conditions and Treatment

Saudi Arabia is home to approximately 13.4 million migrants, representing about 41.6% of the total population. The majority work under the *kafala* (visa sponsorship) system, which grants employers excessive control over workers' mobility and legal status. This system has been criticized for facilitating numerous abuses, such as passport confiscation, delayed wages, and forced labor. Domestic workers, in particular, face severe exploitation, including verbal, physical, and sexual abuse[1][2].

Migrant workers, who constitute about 80% of the private sector labor force, often endure harsh conditions. Reports indicate they suffer from contract substitution, exorbitant recruitment fees, and non-payment of wages. The government's midday outdoor work bans, meant to protect workers from extreme heat, have proven ineffective, and investigations into worker deaths are rare[2].

Access to Asylum Procedures

Saudi Arabia has a low rate of formal asylum applications. In 2022, only 335 individuals were granted refugee status, while 13,483 asylum seekers were registered, predominantly from Syria, Eritrea, Iraq, and Somalia. The country's restrictive asylum policies and opaque procedures have been heavily criticized[3][5].

Although the Saudi government has introduced measures to normalize the status of some displaced individuals by covering work permit fees, these initiatives have been described as inadequate to address the broader issues of exploitation and abuse[3].

Instances of Exploitation and Abuse

A particularly alarming issue is the violent treatment of migrants at the Yemen-Saudi border. Reports have indicated that Saudi border guards have killed hundreds of Ethiopian migrants and asylum seekers attempting to cross, using explosive weapons and engaging in systematic attacks. This raises serious concerns about potential crimes against humanity[1][2].

The *kafala* system fosters a culture of fear among migrant workers, who are often reluctant to report abuses due to the threat of deportation or retaliation from employers. Many workers become undocumented through no fault of their own, frequently after fleeing abusive conditions[1][2].

International and Domestic Responses

International human rights organizations, including Human Rights Watch and ALQST, have called for urgent reforms. They advocate for the dismantling of the *kafala* system and the alignment of Saudi labor laws with international human rights standards. These groups also call for investigations into the killings of migrants at the border and improvements in worker treatment[2][3].

The international community has been urged to hold Saudi Arabia accountable for its human rights obligations, particularly concerning the treatment of migrants and asylum seekers. However, the Saudi government has often diverted attention from these issues by promoting large-scale development projects, such as the NEOM megacity initiative[2].

In summary, while there have been some efforts by Saudi Arabia to address migrant status issues, significant challenges persist regarding living conditions, asylum access, and protection against exploitation and abuse. Immediate and sustained action is needed from both domestic authorities and the international community to uphold the rights and dignity of migrants and refugees in the kingdom.

Citations: [1] [Human Rights Watch - Saudi Arabia 2024](#) [2] [HRW News - Saudi Arabia and Migrants](#) [3] [AGBI - Migrant Status Normalization](#) [4] [IOM - World Migration Report 2024](#) [5] [International Journal of Refugee Law](#)

Legal Framework and Accountability

The UAE's legal system is largely influenced by Sharia law, which can result in discriminatory practices against women, religious minorities, and LGBTQ individuals. While the UAE has introduced some reforms, the legal framework still poses significant challenges:

Recent Reforms:

In November 2020, the UAE undertook significant legal reforms, including:

- Lowering restrictions on alcohol consumption.
- Permitting cohabitation outside of marriage.
- Eliminating reduced sentences for honor killings.
- Abolishing corporal punishment from the penal code[4].

Despite these reforms, capital punishment remains in place, and discriminatory laws against women, migrants, and LGBTQ individuals continue[4].

Judiciary and Accountability

The UAE's judiciary faces substantial issues related to independence and accountability:

1. Judicial Independence:

The UAE judiciary lacks full independence, with considerable influence exerted by the State Security Apparatus. This affects the impartiality of trials and the protection of detainees' rights[1].

2. Detention and Torture:

Detainees held by the State Security Agency often face torture and inhumane conditions. Lawyers, particularly those representing individuals in state security cases, frequently face difficulties in accessing information and may be subjected to harassment[1].

3. Ongoing Cases:

"UAE94" Case: In 2023, authorities continued to detain at least 51 individuals involved in the "UAE94" mass trial, despite their sentences having ended. This trial was criticized for violating rights to free expression, assembly, and association[2].

Examples of Accountability and Impunity

1. Case of K.H.: In April 2024, a Jordanian national working in Dubai was detained by the Abu Dhabi State Security Service for a Facebook post critical of Israel's actions in Gaza. He was held for three days, denied legal representation, and subsequently forced to leave the UAE[4]. This case highlights issues of freedom of expression and arbitrary detention.

2. Ahmed Mansoor: Ahmed Mansoor, a prominent Emirati human rights defender, has been imprisoned in isolation for over six years as of March 2023. Human Rights Watch has called for his release, particularly ahead of the COP28 event in August 2023. His continued detention exemplifies the lack of accountability for human rights violations and the repression of dissent[2][4].

Summary

In summary, while the UAE has made some legal reforms, significant human rights challenges persist. The judiciary's lack of independence, ongoing issues of torture and detention, and the lack of accountability for human rights violations illustrate the gap between the UAE's legal framework and international human rights standards. Addressing these issues remains crucial for improving the human rights situation in the country.

Citations:

- [1] [ADHRB - Human Rights in the UAE](<https://www.adhrb.org/2024/06/human-rights-in-the-uae-insights-from-the-fourth-universal-periodic-review/>)
- [2] [HRW - UAE 2024](<https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2024/country-chapters/united-arab-emirates>)
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- [5] [Amnesty International - UAE](<https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/middle-east-and-north-africa/middle-east/united-arab-emirates/report-united-arab-emirates/>)

International Relations and Human Rights

In 2024, Saudi Arabia's international relations regarding human rights have been marked by significant scrutiny and pressure from global entities. The country's interactions with United Nations bodies and other international organizations have highlighted ongoing human rights concerns, while international pressure and sanctions have impacted its domestic human rights situation.

Engagement with UN Bodies

Saudi Arabia's participation in the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of the UN Human Rights Council in January 2024 was a focal point. The kingdom received 354 recommendations from 135 member states, urging reforms in areas such as freedom of expression, the abolition of the death penalty, and the protection of women's and migrant workers' rights[5]. Despite this engagement, Saudi Arabia has a track record of failing to implement many previously supported recommendations, which has led to skepticism about its commitment to real reform[5].

International Pressure and Sanctions

International pressure on Saudi Arabia has intensified due to its human rights record. The UPR process highlighted issues such as the arbitrary detention of activists, the use of the death penalty for non-lethal crimes, and serious abuses and forced deportations of migrants[3][5]. During a visit in May 2024, Japan's Prime Minister Fumio Kishida was urged to publicly call for improvements in Saudi Arabia's human rights practices, emphasizing the need for accountability[4].

The European Union has also been actively involved in a human rights dialogue with Saudi Arabia, raising concerns about the application of the death penalty and the treatment of dissidents[3]. This international consensus reflects a growing demand for Saudi Arabia to address its human rights violations.

Impact of International Actions on Domestic Human Rights

The international scrutiny has had a mixed impact on Saudi Arabia's domestic human rights situation. While there have been some reforms, such as improvements in women's rights, these changes have been criticized as insufficient and often accompanied by continued repression of dissent[1][3]. For instance, the new Personal Status Law introduces some rights for women but still maintains male guardianship and systemic discrimination[1][4].

Despite international calls for reform, the Saudi government has continued its crackdown on dissent. Activists, including children, have faced harsh sentences for peaceful expressions of opinion, and non-violent offenders have been sentenced to death[3][5].

Conclusion

Overall, Saudi Arabia's international relations concerning human rights in 2024 reveal a landscape of significant external pressure and engagement with international bodies. While there are signs of some reform, the human rights situation remains severe, with ongoing repression and systemic discrimination. The effectiveness of international actions in prompting meaningful change within Saudi Arabia remains a critical issue for global human rights advocates.

Citations:

- [1] [Human Rights Watch](<https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2024/country-chapters/saudi-arabia>)
- [2] [Freedom House](<https://freedomhouse.org/country/saudi-arabia/freedom-world/2024>)
- [3] [Amnesty International](<https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/middle-east-and-north-africa/middle-east/saudi-arabia/report-saudi-arabia/>)
- [4] [Human Rights Watch News](<https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/05/16/japan-press-saudi-arabia-human-rights>)
- [5] [Amnesty International News](<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2024/01/saudi-arabia-authorities-must-abide-by-recommendations-from-un-human-rights-council-review/>)

Recommendations

To the Saudi Arabian Government:

1. **Immediately and unconditionally release** all individuals imprisoned solely for peacefully exercising their rights to freedom of expression, association, and belief, including Mohammed al-Rabea, Abdulrahman al-Sadhan, and Waleed Abu al-Khair.
2. **End the arbitrary detention** and travel bans on women's rights defenders such as Loujain al-Hathloul, Nassimah al-Sadhan, and Samar Badawi.
3. **Amend the Personal Status Law** to remove discriminatory provisions against women regarding marriage, divorce, and decisions about their children, and provisions that facilitate domestic violence and sexual abuse in marriage.
4. **Ensure women have equal rights** to participate fully in decisions related to their children's well-being, regardless of marital status.
5. **Abolish the male guardianship system** and allow women to make independent decisions regarding marriage, divorce, and other personal status matters.
6. **Investigate and hold accountable** Saudi border guards responsible for killing hundreds of Ethiopian migrants and asylum seekers at the Yemen-Saudi border.
7. **Ratify the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights** and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights to strengthen legal protections for human rights.

To the International Community:

1. **Pressure Saudi Arabia** to implement the recommendations above through diplomatic channels and by conditioning economic and political cooperation on human rights improvements.
2. **Establish an independent, international inquiry** to investigate human rights violations in Saudi Arabia, including the killings of migrants at the border and the crackdown on dissent.
3. **Impose targeted sanctions** on Saudi officials responsible for gross human rights abuses, such as arbitrary detention, torture, and extrajudicial killings.
4. **Provide technical assistance and capacity building** to Saudi civil society organizations working to promote human rights and the rule of law.

To Saudi Civil Society Organizations:

1. **Document and report on human rights violations** to raise awareness and hold the government accountable.

2. **Advocate for legal reforms** to end discrimination against women and protect the rights to freedom of expression, association, and belief.

3. **Provide support and assistance** to victims of human rights abuses, such as migrant workers and political prisoners.

4. **Collaborate with international human rights organizations** to amplify your voice and increase pressure on the government.

By implementing these recommendations, Saudi Arabia can make tangible improvements in its human rights record, safeguard vulnerable populations, and enhance its reputation on the global stage. The international community and civil society organizations must persist in their efforts to drive meaningful change and ensure accountability.

Conclusion

The 2024 human rights report on Saudi Arabia reveals a troubling continuation of severe human rights violations across multiple fronts. Despite some superficial reforms, the core issues of repression and discrimination persist, reflecting a deep-seated disregard for fundamental rights and freedoms. One of the key issues highlighted in the report is the ongoing legal and systemic discrimination against women. The Personal Status Law, while ostensibly advancing women's rights, continues to enshrine male guardianship and fails to protect women from domestic violence. Women activists remain at risk of severe punishment, including arbitrary detention and torture, for their advocacy. The report also emphasizes the stringent control over freedom of expression and political repression by the Saudi government. Individuals exercising their rights to free speech and assembly are targeted, with lengthy prison sentences and death penalties being used against dissenters. Ongoing surveillance further underscores the repression faced by human rights defenders in the country.

Another critical issue is the extensive application of the death penalty, including for non-lethal offenses and minors, which raises severe human rights concerns. The lack of transparency and fairness in the judicial system exacerbates these issues, leading to harsh outcomes for those subjected to the judicial process. Migrant rights violations are also a significant concern, as migrant workers continue to suffer severe abuses, including human trafficking and extrajudicial killings. The government's harsh treatment of undocumented migrants, including mass deportations and arbitrary arrests, highlights a systemic disregard for their rights. Additionally, recent legislative changes have increased government access to personal data, threatening privacy rights and enabling the suppression of dissent through digital surveillance. The report underscores the necessity for ongoing international monitoring and pressure to address these human rights violations. The situation in Saudi Arabia demands sustained advocacy to foster accountability and drive meaningful reform. The forthcoming Universal Periodic Review by the UN Human Rights Council represents a crucial opportunity for the international community to hold Saudi Arabia accountable and push for substantial changes. Continuous vigilance and action are vital to improving the human rights landscape in Saudi Arabia, ensuring that the voices of the oppressed are heard and their rights upheld.

Appendices

Statistical Data on Human Rights Issues

1. Population and Migration Statistics

Total Population: Approximately 36.4 million.

Migrant Population: Nearly 13.4 million migrants, constituting 41.6% of the total population.

2. Human Rights Violations

Deaths of Migrants:

Saudi border guards killed hundreds of Ethiopian migrants and asylum seekers from March 2022 to June 2023, utilizing explosive weapons and close-range shootings.

Arrests and Deportations:

In 2023, over 777,000 foreign nationals were arrested for violating labor and residency regulations, with at least 468,000 deported.

Death Sentences:

Courts imposed death sentences following unfair trials, including cases involving individuals who were minors at the time of their alleged crimes

3. Freedom Scores

Global Freedom Score: 8/100 (not free)

Internet Freedom Score: 25/100 (not free)

Glossary of Legal and Human Rights Terms

Kafala System:

A sponsorship system that gives employers excessive control over migrant workers, often leading to exploitation and abuse.

Universal Periodic Review (UPR):

A process by which the human rights records of all UN Member States are reviewed every four years, involving input from various stakeholders including civil society.

Human Trafficking:

The illegal trade of humans for the purposes of forced labor or commercial sexual exploitation.

Arbitrary Detention:

The imprisonment of individuals without legal justification or due process.

Extrajudicial Killings:

Killings carried out without legal process, often by state agents.