

# Roads *to* Reform

---

THE ENDURING WORK OF THE  
SAUDI ASSOCIATION FOR  
CIVIL AND POLITICAL RIGHTS



Americans for Democracy  
& Human Rights in Bahrain



# Roads *to* Reform

---

THE ENDURING WORK OF THE  
SAUDI ASSOCIATION FOR  
CIVIL AND POLITICAL RIGHTS

Americans for Democracy & Human Rights in Bahrain

©2017, Americans for Democracy & Human Rights in Bahrain (ADHRB). All rights reserved.

Americans for Democracy and Human Rights in Bahrain (ADHRB) fosters awareness of, and support for, democracy and human rights in Bahrain and the Middle East.

Americans for Democracy & Human Rights in Bahrain  
1001 Connecticut Ave. Northwest, Suite 205  
Washington, D.C. 20036  
202.621.6141

[www.adhrb.org](http://www.adhrb.org)

# Contents

<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>Chapter One: The Rise of Saudi Arabia’s Modern Opposition Movement and the Challenges It Faced</b> .....	<b>6</b>
<b>Chapter Two: An Overview of ACPRA’s Work</b> .....	<b>14</b>
<b>Chapter Three: ACPRA’S Contributions to the Case for Reform</b> .....	<b>22</b>
<b>Chapter Four: Countering Extremism and Promoting Peaceful Reform in Saudi Arabia – U.S. Policy Recommendations</b> .....	<b>32</b>



## Introduction

In October 2009, 15 activists from across the kingdom of Saudi Arabia established the Saudi Association for Civil and Political Rights (ACPRA).<sup>1</sup> Until the government shut down the organization in 2013 and imprisoned its founders, ACPRA worked to document human rights violations in the kingdom while simultaneously articulating a broad vision for civil and constitutional reform in Saudi Arabia. ACPRA was not the first human rights group in Saudi Arabia to advocate for constitutional reform and a more open civil society. However, the principles on which ACPRA based its case for peaceful change and the ways in which it captivated a new generation of Saudi activists represent an important development in the reform movement in Saudi Arabia that those invested in a more democratic Saudi Arabia should examine. ACPRA successfully invigorated a discourse on political rights, equality and pluralism anchored in universal principles and Islamic sources relevant to Saudi society. It also drew upon the power of social media to effectively transform the state's prosecution of its two most prominent members into a vehicle for spreading its ideas and galvanizing support among Saudi citizens.

In this report, *Roads to Reform: The Enduring Work of the Saudi Association for Civil and Political Rights*, Americans for Democracy & Human Rights in Bahrain (ADHRB) examines the contributions of ACPRA within the larger context of the movement for civil and political reform in Saudi Arabia. Chapter One discusses the rise of the political opposition movement in Saudi Arabia, beginning with the period of widespread dissent in response to the first Gulf War. It explains how the experience of Saudi reformers from the 1990s shaped the causes and demands ACPRA would later advocate for, and outlines the historical challenges that the reform efforts in Saudi Arabia has faced from both government suppression and internal divisions. Chapter Two chronicles the establishment of ACPRA, its advocacy efforts and work on behalf of detainees, and its eventual persecution and demise at the hands of the state. Chapter Three explores the principal objectives of ACPRA and its supporters: combating human rights violations, and promoting human rights awareness, political representation in the form of a constitutional monarchy, and an open civil society. This chapter explains how ACPRA members rooted these objectives, long regarded as essential features of modern democracies, in Islamic concepts and texts, and in so doing laid a foundation for political reform compatible with Saudi Arabia's traditional religious character. Chapter Three also documents ACPRA's strategic use of social media in connection with the trial of the organization's leaders. In its final chapter, the report offers recommendations on how and why the United States should support the efforts of organizations and civil society activists like ACPRA and its members to bring about peaceful political and civil reform. It suggests that the unveiling of Saudi Arabia's new economic development initiative, Saudi Vision 2030, which explicitly emphasizes the country's need for a more engaged and invigorated Saudi citizenry, makes this an opportune time for U.S. leaders to encourage a more active Saudi civil society.

As new waves of authoritarianism and instability emerge in the Middle East in the aftermath of the Arab Spring, those who strive to secure democratic reform and counter violent extremism should examine and support human rights organizations whose advocacy efforts hold the greatest promise for peaceful change. In this light, this report serves to illuminate ACPRA's powerful vision for advancing reform and its unique contributions to this effort.

---

<sup>1</sup> Many refer to the organization by its Arabic acronym, "HASM" (Jamiyyat al-Huquq al-Siyasiyya wa al-Madaniyya).

## CHAPTER ONE

# The Rise of Saudi Arabia's Modern Opposition Movement and the Challenges It Faced

## Gulf War Tension and Political Dissent

---

On 2 August 1990, Sadaam Hussein invaded Kuwait, igniting the Gulf War. As Iraqi troops threatened the critical oil fields in Saudi Arabia's Eastern Province, the Saudi government made the liberation of Kuwait its number one priority.<sup>2</sup> Despite the government's massive military expenditure, the Saudis could not defeat the Iraqi army without outside help. King Fahd sought military assistance from the United States and over 500,000 American troops deployed to the kingdom.<sup>3</sup>

The Gulf War and the presence of American troops on Saudi soil created a crisis of legitimacy for the Saudi ruling family.<sup>4</sup> "We felt betrayed; the Saudi government invested our oil money in large amounts of military equipment ... and now we discovered it was ineffective," writes Saudi journalist Mai Yamani.<sup>5</sup> For conservative critics, the government's reliance on western forces demonstrated the Al Saud's shortcomings as protectors of the kingdom and upholders of Islamic values and integrity. A group of clerics and scholars, known as the *al-Sahwa* (awakening) movement, reacted by questioning the absolute authority of the Al Saud monarchy and calling for a greater Islamization of the state.<sup>6</sup> A discourse of dissent that had been absent from the public conscious for decades was reignited. As scholar Madawi Al Rasheed writes, "Autumn 1990 witnessed unprecedented discussions that in the past had been confined to private domains. The debate revolved around several issues, some directly related to the Gulf Wars, while others touched upon the very foundation of the Saudi political system and the legitimacy of the ruling group."<sup>7</sup>

While this period was characterized by the prominence of religious dissenters, critics of the government were not limited to the Islamist opposition. Saudi liberals and more secularly inclined activists similarly resisted the monarchy and advocated for government reform. Many of ACPRA's co-founders began their careers as opposition figures in the 1990s and the work that they embarked on and the causes they embraced would emerge again in the work and mission of ACPRA in the next century.

## The Emerging Opposition and Demands for Reform

---

In the wake of the Gulf War, reformers expressed their political grievances and demands in a wave of petitions and open letters to King Fahd. In December 1990, 43 moderate activists, including former cabinet ministers, prominent businessmen, writers and university professors, sent an open letter to the King proposing 10 reforms.<sup>8</sup> While the petition's preamble pledged allegiance to the

2 Madawi Al Rasheed, *A History of Saudi Arabia* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 158-159.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid.

5 Mai Yamani, *Changed Identities: The Challenge of the New Generation in Saudi Arabia* (London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 2000), 167.

6 For more on the *Sahwa* movement see: Stéphane Lacroix, *Awakening Islam: The Politics of Religious Dissent in Contemporary Saudi Arabia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011).

7 Al Rasheed, *A History of Saudi Arabia*, 160.

8 Roel Meijer and Paul Aarts (eds.), "Saudi Arabia Between Conservatism, Accommodation and Reform," (The Hague: Institute of International Relations 'Clingendael', 2012), 5. [https://www.clingendael.nl/sites/default/files/20120000\\_research\\_report\\_rmeijer.pdf](https://www.clingendael.nl/sites/default/files/20120000_research_report_rmeijer.pdf), 5.



government and the royal family, the letter reflected broad dissatisfaction on key political issues such as inequality before the law and the excessive powers of the religious police, officially known as the Committee for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice (CPVPV).<sup>9</sup> The letter sought the revival of municipal councils and the formation of a consultative council, the reform of the judiciary and the CPVPV, greater freedom for the media, and increased participation of women in the public sphere, within the confines of the *Sharia*.<sup>10</sup>

In May 1991, 52 Islamists sent a letter to King Fahd demanding government reforms to address the perceived moral corruption of the Saudi state.<sup>11</sup> The “Letter of Demands” included many of the same points as the December 1990 petition, albeit in an overtly religious framework. According to Saudi scholars, the Letter of Demands was the first major document of the Saudi Islamist reform movement.<sup>12</sup> The signatories demanded a consultative assembly “independent of any pressure that might affect its real responsibility,” a government of experts and technocrats, equal rights and respect for individual dignity, responsible rulers, a more just distribution of the oil revenues, reform of the army, reform of the media, freedom of expression within the scope of *Sharia*, reform of foreign policy, autonomy of religious institutions, and independence of the judicial apparatus.<sup>13</sup> Overall, the petition called for the government to more rigorously apply and adhere to Islamic laws, principles, and morals.

The Letter of Demands was the forerunner to a lengthier petition signed by over 100 Islamists in October 1991, titled the “Memorandum of Advice.” The memorandum raised 10 major issues, each of which was discussed from an Islamic standpoint, including the reform of the judiciary, the protection of human rights under *Sharia*, the role of the clergy, and the government’s military reliance on western powers.<sup>14</sup> Notably, it argued that all forms of torture, invasive intelligence gathering and detention should be prohibited.<sup>15</sup> The petition significantly undermined the Islamic authority of the Al Saud government by expressing linking the need for structural changes to greater respect for *Sharia*. It was a sharp critique of the regime’s structures which, according to Islamist reformers, “legitimated administrative and financial corruption ... sanctioned injustice, despotism, widespread corruption and nepotism.”<sup>16</sup> As one of the memorandum’s authors put it, the petition “caused deep and unprecedented concern for the Saudi government as it applied, for the first time, the Islamic view on a number of important issues: freedom of speech, independence of judiciary and separation of the legislative institution from the executive.”<sup>17</sup>

Many of the signatories to the Memorandum of Advice, including future ACPRA co-founders Abdullah al-Hamid and Suliman al-Rashudi, were active in the developing human rights and political justice movement. In 1993, al-Hamid and al-Rashudi, along with four other judges and sheikhs, established the Committee for the Defense of Legitimate Rights (CDLR).<sup>18</sup> The CDLR was

9 Al Rasheed, *A History of Saudi Arabia*, 163.

10 Ibid.

11 Sources explain the letter had 52 primary signatories but over 450 signatures in total, including from a number of Saudi liberals. See: Roel Meijer and Paul Aarts (eds.), “Saudi Arabia Between Conservatism, Accommodation and Reform,” 5.

12 Daryl Champion, *The Paradoxical Kingdom: Saudi Arabia and the Momentum of Reform* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 221.

13 Pascal Ménoret, *The Saudi Enigma: A History* (New York: Zed Books, 2005), 124.

14 Champion, *The Paradoxical Kingdom*, 222-223.

15 Al Rasheed, *A History of Saudi Arabia*, 165.

16 Champion, *The Paradoxical Kingdom*, 225.

17 Mansoor Jassem Alshamsi, *Islam and Political Reform in Saudi Arabia: The Quest for Political Change and Reform* (Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2011), 105.

18 Alshamsi, *Islam and Political Reform in Saudi Arabia: The Quest for Political Change and Reform*, 110.

the first Saudi opposition group to publicly challenge the monarchy, accusing the government and senior *ulama* (religious scholars) of failing to protect the Islamic rights of Muslims.<sup>19</sup>

Saudi officials quickly banned the organization and less than two weeks after its establishment, authorities arrested CDLR spokesperson, Mohammed al-Masari. Within days, numerous CDLR supporters were arrested. Other supporters, including some 60 university professors, were either dismissed from their government jobs, banned from traveling, or both.<sup>20</sup> In September 1993, CDLR Sheikhs Salman al-Awda and Safar al-Hawali were banned from speaking in public and dismissed from their academic posts.<sup>21</sup> In September 1994, al-Awda and al-Hawali were arrested and held without charge or trial. Their detention sparked large demonstrations, especially in al-Awda's home city of Burayda, where observers reported that 500 activists had occupied the governor's house in what became known as the "Burayda uprising."<sup>22</sup>

In November 1993, al-Masari was released and, after escaping the country, reestablished the CDLR in London with Sa'ad al-Fagih, a key leader in the preparation of the Letter of Demands and Memorandum of Advice.<sup>23</sup> The CDLR continued its activities from abroad, managing to regularly distribute its materials inside Saudi Arabia while raising public awareness of its concerns in the United Kingdom. According to Saudi historian Daryl Champion, the CDLR came to represent two things the Saudi government feared and loathed: "organized opposition and publicity."<sup>24</sup>

In March 1996, the CDLR splintered as two of its cofounders, al-Masari and al-Fagih, fell out over what the CDLR stood for and how it should organize.<sup>25</sup> Al-Fagih moved on to establish the Movement for Islamic Reform in Arabia, another London-based opposition group. The breakup of the CDLR and the tension between its founders did not bode well for future efforts to unite opposition leaders and groups. Rather, it was emblematic of the fragmented nature of human rights advocacy and dissent in Saudi Arabia, especially among ideologically-driven groups.<sup>26</sup> In many ways, ACPRA sought to overcome the divisiveness that plagued its predecessors such as the CDLR. The next chapter details how ACPRA unified individuals across previously disparate reform camps and in doing so revived the state of opposition that had dwindled by the close of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

## **Government Response: Reforms and State Repression**

In an attempt to placate the growing number of dissenters while still safeguarding the monarchy's absolute authority, King Fahd announced what appeared to be three significant reforms in March 1992: the Basic Law of Governance, the Law of the Consultative Council and the Law of the Provinces.<sup>27</sup>

19 Andrzej Kapiszewski, "Saudi Arabia: Steps Toward Democratization or Reconfiguration of Authoritarianism?," *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 41, no. 5-6 (October 1, 2006), 462. <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/0021909606067407>, 4.

20 Human Rights Watch, "Human Rights in Saudi Arabia: A Deafening Silence, Human Rights Watch Background, December 2001," [Humanrightswatch.org](http://www.hrw.org/legacy/backgrounder/mena/saudi/saudi.pdf), December 2001, accessed December 20, 2016, <https://www.hrw.org/legacy/backgrounder/mena/saudi/saudi.pdf>, 7-8.

21 Ibid.

22 Champion, *The Paradoxical Kingdom*, 230.

23 Human Rights Watch, "Human Rights in Saudi Arabia: A Deafening Silence," 8.

24 Champion, *The Paradoxical Kingdom*, 227.

25 Champion, *The Paradoxical Kingdom*, 249-251.

26 Ibid.

27 Al Rasheed, *A History of Saudi Arabia*, 167.

The Basic Law of Governance, simply referred to as the “Basic Law,” set out the main governing framework of the kingdom. Its first article declares Saudi Arabia to be a sovereign Arab Islamic State with its constitution being the Quran and Sunnah.<sup>28</sup> The Basic Law details the order of succession and requires all citizens to pledge allegiance to the King in both “pleasant and unpleasant times.”<sup>29</sup> It specifies that the judiciary is to be independent, while at the same time the law provides that judges are appointed and terminated by royal decree.

Article 68 of the Basic Law, known as the Law of the Consultative Council, laid out the formation of a consultative council (*Majlis al-Shura*), a (then) 60-member advisory body, all appointed by the King.<sup>30</sup> The council was empowered to study government regulations, treaties and international accords before they were promulgated through royal decrees. Its members were tasked with evaluating economic and social development programs, discussing annual ministerial reports, and presenting recommendations to the King and his ministers.<sup>31</sup>

Lastly, King Fahd announced a third reform relating to local government. The Law of the Provinces divided Saudi Arabia’s provinces into 14 governates, which in turn contained their own precincts and districts.<sup>32</sup> It created provincial councils, comprising the governing prince, his deputy, local representatives of government ministries, and at least ten local citizens appointed by the King.

The promulgation of these reforms suggests the impact of the Saudi opposition movement of the 1990s on the ruling establishment. Aware that the kingdom’s legitimacy was threatened, King Fahd responded directly to the demand for a consultative council and issued a series of political reforms that served to shore up the royal family’s authority, while simultaneously creating the appearance that the government was responsive to the grievances of the people.

Tellingly, the government reforms coincided with the rise of state violence against suspected dissidents. The Ministry of Interior and its intelligence services mobilized to suppress any activity deemed threatening to the state.<sup>33</sup> For example, shortly after presenting the 1991 Memorandum of Advice, co-author Dr. Ahmad al-Tuwayjri was confronted by authorities from the Ministry of Interior. “A group of officers from the *Mabahith* arrived at my house,” remembers Dr. Ahmad al-Tuwayjri.<sup>34</sup> He continued, “They wanted to know if there was a plot. That was the purpose of the whole thing. They had been caught out by the Memorandum. Now they wanted to be sure we had not been conspiring to overthrow the government.”<sup>35</sup> Al-Tuwayjri spent 40 days in prison. His experience echoes that of the many Saudi activists arrested during this time. In 1994, Minister of the Interior Prince Nayef acknowledged that 110 Saudi citizens had been arrested for actions that “undermined national security.”<sup>36</sup> Opposition sources claimed the number to be over 1,000 and Amnesty International reports issued during the aftermath of the Gulf War document an increase in cases of torture and imprisonment in the kingdom.<sup>37</sup>

28 “The Basic Law of Governance,” mofa.gov, September 20, 2011, accessed December 20, 2016, <http://www.mofa.gov.sa/sites/mofaen/ServicesAndInformation/aboutKingDom/SaudiGovernment/Pages/BasicSystemOfGovernance35297.aspx>.

29 Ibid.

30 The current council size is 150 members, following increases in 1997, 2001, and 2005.

31 Kapiszewski, “Saudi Arabia: Steps Toward Democratization or Reconfiguration of Authoritarianism?,” 462.

32 Al Rasheed, *A History of Saudi Arabia*, 169.

33 Ibid.

34 Robert Lacey, *Inside the Kingdom: Kings, Clerics, Modernists, Terrorists, and the Struggle for Saudi Arabia* (London: Hutchinson, London St Leonards, Sussex, 2009), 163.

35 Ibid, 164.

36 Al Rasheed, *A History of Saudi Arabia*, 170.

37 Ibid.

When discussing this Gulf War period of resistance and subsequent repression, it is important to acknowledge and distinguish the different strands of opposition. While a number of Islamists in the 1990s supported the use of violence as a part of their political and ideological struggle, many others, including the future co-founders of ACPRA, firmly rejected it. Meanwhile, the government's policy of mass arrests and increased repression failed to alleviate the rise of extremism. To the contrary, increased government repression impelled many Islamists towards greater radicalism.<sup>38</sup> Scholar Pascal Menoret writes that the "repression of the intifada [uprising] in Burayda, together with the government strategy of closure, drove a minority of the Islamist movement to take violent and desperate actions."<sup>39</sup> This minority, coupled with the thousands of returning Saudi nationals who had fought in Afghanistan, contributed to the growth of an extremist fringe that carried out domestic terror attacks in the late 1990s and early 2000s, including two bomb attacks against U.S. military installations in Riyadh and Khobar in 1995 and 1996.<sup>40</sup> Menoret explains that these terror attacks were an expression of the political frustration of this extremist minority and should not be confused as a "consequence of the legalist and constitutionalist demands of the majority current within Saudi Islamism."<sup>41</sup> It is pivotal to understand this distinction and to separate out the legitimate societal grievances and constructive calls for reform that came from Islamists in the 1990s from the actions of the extremist fringe.

In sum, during the early to mid-1990s, the Saudi monarchy grappled with widespread instability. Gulf War-related dissent led many to openly question the policies and even the very legitimacy of the Al Saud monarchy, and the government responded with political declarations of reform but also with active repression and mass arrests. By the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Saudi officials had reasserted control over the political opposition forces of the 1990s and the authority of the Al Saud appeared to be secure.

## 21<sup>st</sup> Century Renewed Calls for Reform

---

On 11 September, 2001, 19 al-Qaeda terrorists hijacked four U.S. passenger planes, crashing them into the World Trade Center, the Pentagon, and, in a near miss of Washington DC, a rural field in western Pennsylvania. Fifteen of the hijackers were from Saudi Arabia. As the U.S. reacted to the deadliest foreign attack on American soil, many in Saudi Arabia argued that government policies that tolerated extremism, undermined accountability, and rejected greater political participation were partly to blame for the rise in Saudi terrorist activity.<sup>42</sup> Those who adopted this position were known as reformers, "a loosely defined category of activists, who belonged to different political and ideological positions, including the Islamists."<sup>43</sup> These reformers capitalized on the international outcry to renew their push for greater government reforms and open dialogue in this short-lived period dubbed the "Riyadh Spring."

Between 2003 and 2005, several petitions were sent to then Crown Prince Abdullah, asking for basic freedoms and political participation.<sup>44</sup> In January 2003, 104 academics, businessmen, religious scholars, and professionals submitted a petition called "A Vision for the Present and the

---

38 Menoret, *The Saudi Enigma*, 126.

39 Ibid.

40 Ibid.

41 Ibid.

42 Madawi Al-Rasheed, *Muted Modernists: The Struggle over Divine Politics in Saudi Arabia* (London, United Kingdom: C Hurst & Co Publishers, 2015), 32.

43 Ibid.

44 Kapiszewski, "Steps Toward Democratization of Reconfiguration of Authoritarianism?" 465.

Future of the Nation.”<sup>45</sup> Grounding their demands within the framework of *Sharia*, the signatories called for an “open national conference” to discuss problems within the kingdom, for changing the consultative council into an elected legislative body, for an independent judiciary, freedom of expression, and for the establishment of civil society institutions.<sup>46</sup> While it couched its demands in non-confrontational and respectful language towards the monarchy, the January petition sought institutional changes designed to curb the power of the Al Saud family. It promoted popular participation in decision-making and regulatory oversight for government institutions.<sup>47</sup>

The January 2003 petition spurred stronger appeals. The following September, more than 300 Saudis signed a petition titled “In Defense of the Nation.” They repeated the demands of the previous petition, while drawing a causal connection between the evolution of Saudi terrorism and government restrictions on political development. The petition asserted:

“Being late in adopting radical reforms and ignoring popular participation in decision-making have been the main reasons that helped the fact that our country reach this dangerous turn, and this is why we believe that denying the natural rights of the political, cultural and intellectual society to express its opinions has led to the dominance of a certain way of thinking that is unable to dialogue with others ... which is what helped create the terrorist and judgmental mind that our country is still plagued with.”<sup>48</sup>

## Reforms Under Abdullah and Their Limited Impact

In response to these petitions, Crown Prince Abdullah convened a series of “National Dialogues” in 2003 and 2004 wherein Saudis from all over the country discussed emerging political and social concerns.<sup>49</sup> The dialogue themes ranged from religious tolerance, to the empowerment of women, to the economy. Though the convening of the National Dialogues signaled a willingness on behalf of government authorities to engage with Saudi reformers, the impact of the dialogues and Crown Prince Abdullah’s subsequent reforms were limited.<sup>50</sup>

Critics characterized the National Dialogues as a tightly controlled government exercise limited to a select elite. For example, though the third National Dialogue session was devoted to the “Rights and Duties of Women,” the meeting was dominated by conservative men and controversial topics like the driving ban and guardianship system were avoided.<sup>51</sup> Furthermore, King Abdullah largely ignored dialogue recommendations for structural reforms and increased political participation, such as holding elections for the Consultative Council; promoting the establishment of trade unions, voluntary associations and other civil society institutions; separating the legislative, executive and judiciary powers; developing new more tolerant school curriculums; and broadening freedom of expression.<sup>52</sup> Noting that the National Dialogues were a poor substitute for meaningful reform, ACPRA co-founder Mohammad al-Qahtani commented during a 2011 interview that if the regime really wanted dialogue, it would free the press.<sup>53</sup>

45 Ibid.

46 Ibid.

47 International Crisis Group, “Can Saudi Arabia Reform Itself?,” [crisisgroup.org](http://www-tc.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/saud/themes/canreform.pdf), July 2004, accessed December 20, 2016, <http://www-tc.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/saud/themes/canreform.pdf>, 14.

48 Kapiszewski, “Steps Toward Democratization of Reconfiguration of Authoritarianism?,” 466

49 Ibid., 467

50 Ibid.

51 Ibid.

52 Ibid.

53 Joas Wagemakers, “Arguing for Change under Benevolent Oppression: Intellectual Trends and Debates in Saudi Arabia?,” in *Saudi Arabia Between Conservatism, Accommodation and Reform*, 28.

One change Crown Prince Abdullah did announce in conjunction with the convening of the National Dialogues in 2003 was the scheduling of municipal council elections for the first time since the 1950s.<sup>54</sup> The elections were to be held within 12 months, and supporters of the King heralded the convening of elections as an example of a developing political openness in the kingdom, which “establishes the principle that society could participate in making policy.”<sup>55</sup>

Similar to the National Dialogues, the elections’ significance was largely symbolic. Doubts about the elections began to arise when nine months after the announcement of elections, authorities had yet to make any public preparations.<sup>56</sup> It was then declared that only half the council seats were to be filled by elections (the remaining seats being appointed), and women could neither vote nor run as candidates. Critics also noted the inherent limitation of the municipal councils’ mandate, which dealt principally with the provision of local services rather than matters of national interest.

Low voter turnout (around 11 percent in Riyadh) signaled a widespread lack of interest in what were seen as meaningless elections.<sup>57</sup> After the elections, state officials postponed the first meetings of the municipal councils for more than a year, further underscoring their insignificance.<sup>58</sup>

King Abdullah continued to implement sporadic reforms and, relative to previous kings, the late King can be considered a “gradual modernizer.”<sup>59</sup> In 2011, he issued a historic decree granting women the right to vote and to run in future municipal elections planned for 2015. In 2013, he appointed 30 women to the consultative council. In practice, however, none of these measures answered the demands for greater political representation, government transparency, and an independent judiciary. Rather, because the King could appoint whomever he wanted to government positions of power, these reforms were carefully calibrated to maintain the monarchy’s political control.<sup>60</sup>

In reality, King Abdullah, like many in the Saudi governing elite, was steadfastly hostile towards anything other than cosmetic reform, and highly skeptical of the reformists who promoted a more open, representative, and participatory government. As reformers circulated the January 2003 “A Vision for the Present and the Future of the Nation” petition, then-Crown Prince Abdullah delivered a speech that blended his support for gradual change with a thinly-veiled warning to more progressive reformers:

“[T]he state will not allow anybody to destroy national unity or disturb the peace of its people under the pretext of reforms ... We will not leave the security of the nation and the future of its people to the mercy of opportunists, who start with provocation and end with arbitrary demands.”<sup>61</sup>

54 Kapiszewski, “Steps Toward Democratization of Reconfiguration of Authoritarianism?” 469.

55 International Crisis Group, “Can Saudi Arabia Reform Itself?,” 19.

56 Ibid.

57 Pascal Menoret, *Repression and Protest in Saudi Arabia*, report no. 101, Crown Center for Middle East Studies, Brandeis University, August 2016, accessed August 2016, <https://www.brandeis.edu/crown/publications/meb/MEB101.pdf>, 3.

58 Ibid.

59 Angus McDowall, “Saudi King Abdullah Was a Cautious Reformer,” reuters.com, January 23, 2015, accessed December 20, 2016, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-saudi-succession-abdullah-obituary-idUSKBN0KW00720150123>.

60 Hala Aldosari, “Saudi Arabia’s Virtual Quest for Citizenship and Identity,” October 2016, accessed December 20, 2016, <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/uploads/Documents/pubs/BeyondIslamists-Aldosari.pdf>, 3.

61 International Crisis Group, “Can Saudi Arabia Reform Itself?,” 18.

According to commentators, the “arbitrary demands” to which Crown Prince Abdullah referred were the reformers’ calls for a constitution.<sup>62</sup>

Given Crown Prince Abdullah’s response to calls for genuine political reform in the January 2003 petition, his government’s resistance to the activities of ACPRA, as detailed in the next chapter, comes as no surprise. Unexpected, however, were the ways in which ACPRA members were able to further the cause of reform, fusing both religious and secular ideologies and tapping into the hearts and minds of a wide swath of Saudis, despite state efforts to stifle their voices.

---

62 Ibid.

## CHAPTER TWO

# An Overview of ACPRA's Work

## The Establishment of ACPRA and its Mission

---

On 12 October 2009, 15 activists from Riyadh, Qasim, and Jawf announced the establishment of ACPRA.<sup>63</sup> Because four of the co-founders were on trial at the time of the announcement, 11 members signed the organization's founding statement. ACPRA's founders included:<sup>64</sup>

- Dr. Abdullah al-Hamid, born in 1951, writer, former professor of comparative literature and long-time human rights activist, with a PhD in Islamic economics from Umm al-Qura University in Mecca;
- Dr. Mohammad Fahad al-Qahtani, born in 1965, professor of economics at the Institute of Diplomatic Studies, a unit of the Foreign Ministry, with a PhD in economics from Indiana University;
- Dr. Abdulkareem Yousef al-Khathar, born in 1964, professor of comparative jurisprudence in the Faculty of the Islamic Jurisprudence at al-Qassim University;
- Dr. Abdulrahman al-Hamid, born in 1962, assistant professor of Islamic Economics;
- Mohammed Saleh al-Bajadi, born in 1978, businessman and previous founder of human rights group Forum for Cultural Debate;
- Sheikh Suliman al-Rashudi, born in 1937, former judge and lawyer;
- Fowzan Mohsen al-Harbi, born in 1977, mechanical engineer at King Abdul Aziz City for Science and Technology in Riyadh;
- Omar al-Said, born in 1990, ACPRA's youngest founding member.

As discussed in Chapter Three, the very formation of ACPRA represented a milestone in the reform movement in Saudi Arabia. Its founding members included preeminent scholars, activists and public figures from widely divergent backgrounds. By uniting both secular and Islamist reformers, ACPRA bridged the divisions between ideological groups that had rejected each other in the past.<sup>65</sup>

Defying Saudi Arabia's ban on unlicensed civil society organizations, ACPRA's founding members announced the organization's formation in an open letter to King Abdullah. They described the establishment of ACPRA as a response to the deteriorating human rights situation within the kingdom and as an attempt to reform the government institutions most complicit in the kingdom's violations of citizen rights.<sup>66</sup>

---

63 Al Rasheed, *Muted Modernists*, 60.

64 For a full list of ACPRA member biographies, see: Amnesty International, "Saudi Arabia's ACPRA: How the Kingdom Silences Its Human Rights Activists," October 2014, accessed December 20, 2016, [https://www.amnesty.nl/sites/default/files/public/saudi\\_arabias\\_acpra\\_how\\_the\\_kingdom\\_silences\\_his\\_human\\_rights\\_activists\\_0.pdf](https://www.amnesty.nl/sites/default/files/public/saudi_arabias_acpra_how_the_kingdom_silences_his_human_rights_activists_0.pdf).

65 Al Rasheed, *Muted Modernists*, 73.

66 Saudi Civil and Political Rights Association (ACPRA), "Saudi Civil and Political Rights Association: An Establishing Declaration," WebCite Query Result, October 2009, accessed December 20, 2016, <http://www.webcitation.org/5xSTUw1KW>. Archived from the original site: [http://acpra.net/news\\_view\\_5.html](http://acpra.net/news_view_5.html)



ACPRA's establishment declaration (the "Foundation Statement") called for the protection and promotion of human rights through peaceful means, including research and documentation of alleged violations; the publication of fact-finding and other reports; outreach and advocacy; and awareness-raising initiatives, such as workshops and lectures.<sup>67</sup> The statement laid out ACPRA's mission of "promoting human rights awareness to become a corner stone in our culture, and emphasizing other important values such as justice, rights, political and ideological plurality, tolerance, and civilized dialogues."<sup>68</sup> Following its inception, ACPRA held regular informal meetings with small audiences in private homes. Members discussed current events, lectured on human rights, and provided support to the families of victims of the kingdom's human rights abuses.<sup>69</sup>

Based in part on their own experiences as political prisoners, ACPRA's founders identified the Saudi criminal justice system as a key human rights concern. Some sources estimate that by 2010 there were tens of thousands of political prisoners in Saudi Arabia.<sup>70</sup> ACPRA helped relatives of prisoners file complaints of unlawful detention under Saudi law with the kingdom's Board of Grievances. It also regularly communicated information on cases of human rights violations through mechanisms set up by the United Nations to address human rights abuses, including communications with the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention and other Special Procedures. Through these channels of communication, ACPRA provided a relatively safe and accessible vehicle for detainees and their families to report their cases of injustice, ill-treatment and torture.

By working directly with families of prisoners, ACPRA developed an engaged community of activists. ACPRA held weekly meetings during which families and former prisoners shared their stories and discussed strategies for dealing with the Saudi criminal justice system.<sup>71</sup> According to al-Qahtani, by 2011 ACPRA represented 246 families of prisoners.<sup>72</sup> That same year, ACPRA gathered 1,450 signatures on a petition calling on the government to free all political prisoners, and established an advocacy Facebook page, "Prisoners Until When?"<sup>73</sup> Most significantly, ACPRA members organized and peacefully protested alongside the family members of arbitrarily detained and political prisoners, in direct defiance of the country's ban on demonstrations.<sup>74</sup>

## ACPRA Challenges the Ministry of Interior

ACPRA's focus on the rights of prisoners put it in conflict with the Saudi Ministry of Interior (MOI), the government entity responsible for national security affairs. The MOI oversees numerous agencies, including the regular police force, the Special Forces, and domestic and international intelligence.<sup>75</sup> ACPRA members described the MOI as "a state within a state" because of the extensive and uncontrolled powers it wields within the kingdom.<sup>76</sup>

67 Ibid.

68 Ibid.

69 Madawi al-Rasheed, *Muted Modernists*, 62.

70 Pascal Menoret, "Saudi Arabia," in *The Middle East*, ed. Ellen Lust, 13th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: CQ Press), 746.

71 David B. Ottoway, "Saudi Arabia in the Shadow of the Arab Revolt," report, The Woodrow Wilson Center for International Scholars, 2011, accessed December 20, 2016, [https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/Saudi Arabia in the Shadow of the Arab Revolt\\_0.pdf](https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/Saudi%20Arabia%20in%20the%20Shadow%20of%20the%20Arab%20Revolt_0.pdf), 10.

72 Ibid.

73 Ibid.

74 Ibid.

75 Americans for Democracy & Human Rights in Bahrain (ADHRB), "Mapping the Saudi State, Chapter Two: The Ministry of Interior Part One," May 2015, accessed December 20, 2016, [www.adhrb.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/2015.04.24\\_MSSCh.2\\_The-MOI-Pt.-1.pdf](http://www.adhrb.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/2015.04.24_MSSCh.2_The-MOI-Pt.-1.pdf).

76 Amnesty International, "Saudi Arabia's ACPRA: How the Kingdom Silences Its Human Rights Activists," 7.

The MOI operates its own intelligence agency, the General Directorate of Investigations, known as the *Mabahith* within Saudi Arabia. The *Mabahith* is the organization most consistently implicated in the perpetration of human rights violations in the kingdom, including torture and forced disappearances.<sup>77</sup> The intelligence agency oversees its own prisons and detention centers, and operates with considerable autonomy within the MOI.<sup>78</sup> *Mabahith* officers are given free license to arrest, detain, abuse and torture suspects.

The MOI also wields significant influence over the operations of Saudi Arabia's Specialized Criminal Court (SCC). The SCC was established in 2008 to handle the increasing number of national security cases in the state. While no formal relationship exists between the SCC and the MOI, the Saudi Minister of Interior personally appoints the SCC's judges. The MOI also controls the processing of cases against both suspected terrorists and nonviolent political activists and thus has absolute power to determine what charges a suspect will face, and which individuals will be tried before the SCC as terrorists.<sup>79</sup>

Through its advocacy efforts, ACPRA publicly exposed the human rights abuses perpetrated by the MOI, the *Mabahith*, the SCC, and the ways in which these institutions exercised their power to quash peaceful dissent.

One of ACPRA's earliest advocacy efforts centered on the actions taken by the MOI against ACPRA co-founder, veteran judge Suliman al-Rashudi. In 2007, Saudi authorities arrested al-Rashudi and several other reformers who had met in Jeddah to discuss the establishment of a civil society organization to advocate for constitutional reforms.<sup>80</sup> MOI officials held al-Rashudi for over two years before he was formally charged in 2010. In 2009, ACPRA wrote an open letter to King Abdullah highlighting the "severe physical and psychological tortures" the septuagenarian judge had suffered at the hands of the MOI. The abuses included chaining al-Rashudi's feet together and then to a bed frame at night and forcing him into a sitting position throughout the day.<sup>81</sup> The letter pointedly asked King Abdullah what kind of message did the torture of Judge al-Rashudi send to his "young followers who admire his ideas of peaceful activities?"<sup>82</sup>

In 2011, ACPRA escalated its campaign against the MOI's human rights violations and publicly called for the firing and prosecution of the Minister of the Interior, former Crown Prince Nayef bin Abdulaziz. In an open letter to the King, ACPRA stated, "As long as his authority is unchecked, he will continue to employ his 30-year experience to continue oppression and domination through

77 Americans for Democracy & Human Rights in Bahrain (ADHRB), "Mapping the Saudi State, Chapter Two: The Ministry of Interior Part One."

78 Ibid.

79 "Mapping the Saudi State, Chapter Three: The Ministry of Interior Part Two," Americans for Democracy & Human Rights in Bahrain (ADHRB), June 2015. <http://www.adhrb.org/2015/06/mapping-the-saudi-state-chapter-3-the-moi-part-2/>

80 ALQST, "The Jeddah Reformers - ALQST Advocating for Human Rights Saudi Arabia QST," ALQST Advocating for Human Rights Saudi Arabia QST, February 2, 2014, accessed December 20, 2016, <https://alqst.org/eng/the-jeddah-reformers/>.

81 The United States of America, Department of State, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, *2010 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices*, April 8, 2011, accessed December 20, 2016, <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/160475.pdf>.

82 "The Court Proceedings of Judge Al-Reshoudi Vs the Ministry of Interior - الجمعية الحقوق المدنية والسياسية في السعودية," Web-archive-me.com: Acpra.me, December 25, 2013, accessed December 20, 2016, [http://web-archive-me.com/me/a/acpra.me/2013-12-.25\\_3407698\\_70/The\\_Court\\_Proceedings\\_of\\_Judge\\_Al\\_Reshoudi\\_Vs\\_the\\_Ministry\\_of\\_Interior](http://web-archive-me.com/me/a/acpra.me/2013-12-.25_3407698_70/The_Court_Proceedings_of_Judge_Al_Reshoudi_Vs_the_Ministry_of_Interior). (Archived from the original ACPRA site at: [http://www.acpra.me/news\\_view\\_42.html](http://www.acpra.me/news_view_42.html))

penetration arteries of the State.”<sup>83</sup> ACPRA sought not only the removal and prosecution of Prince Nayef but also called for the prosecution of *Mabahith* officers, interrogators and prison wardens, as well as judges complicit in human rights violations.<sup>84</sup> The letter drew a direct connection between the rise of extremism in the country and the Ministry’s injustices and reiterated calls for the establishment of an independent committee to investigate the MOI’s violations.

In addition to petitioning the King to hold the MOI accountable, ACPRA appealed to international bodies. Later that year, ACPRA detailed the abuses of the *Mabahith* in a scathing letter to Saudi officials and the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC), including the Committee Against Torture and the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention.<sup>85</sup> The letter chronicled the *Mabahith’s* disregard for the law, the harassment and threats it leveled against Saudi activists, its systematic use of torture on dozens of human rights defenders, and its complete lack of accountability. In addition, the letter brought to light the violations carried out by the SCC. The letter was one of the first accounts of how, under the guise of national security, the SCC was blatantly violating the rights of the accused. It stated:

“Under the pretext of the alleged war against terrorism, the Ministry of Interior (MOI) has created ‘special courts’ under its own jurisdiction. These are illegal because they operate outside the judiciary. These courts violate the rights of the defenders and the prisoners document forced confessions extracted under torture and coercion. Their trials convene without the attendance of the prisoner’s family, independent media, or human rights activists. In these secret court sessions, the accused is deprived of the right for an attorney during the hearings.”<sup>86</sup>

In November 2012, the late King Abdullah removed Prince Nayef as Interior Minister and appointed his son, Mohammed bin Nayef, to replace him. Bin Nayef had previously served as the kingdom’s counterterrorism chief and U.S. officials hailed him as an indispensable partner in the fight against extremism.<sup>87</sup> Inside the kingdom, however, the move did little to change the MOI’s repressive tactics. With bin Nayef at the helm, the MOI proceeded with its crackdown on ACPRA members.

## Government Persecution of ACPRA

The government’s campaign to dismantle ACPRA began in March 2011 with the arrest of ACPRA cofounder, Mohammed al-Bajadi. Officers detained al-Bajadi after he participated in a peaceful protest outside MOI headquarters in Riyadh, calling for the release of political prisoners. Following a secret trial in which officials denied al-Bajadi legal representation, the SCC sentenced al-Bajadi to four years in prison on 12 April 2012 on charges arising from his work with ACPRA.<sup>88</sup> The court found al-Bajadi guilty of participating in the “establishment of an unlicensed organization, harming the image of the state through the media, calling on the families of political detainees to protest and hold sit-ins, contesting the independence of the judiciary, and having banned books in his possession.”<sup>89</sup>

83 The Saudi Association for Civil and Political Rights, “ACPRA Sends Letters to Top Saudi Officials, and UNHRC about HR Violation,” *Islam Daily*, August 13, 2011, accessed December 20, 2016, <http://www.islamdaily.org/en/saudi-arabia/10036.article.htm>.

84 *Ibid.*

85 *Ibid.*

86 *Ibid.*

87 Ken Sullivan, “Meet the Saudi Royal Family’s Rising Star, Prince Mohammed Bin Nayef,” *The Washington Post*, January 23, 2015, accessed December 20, 2016, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle\\_east/meet-the-saudi-royal-familys-rising-star-mohammed-bin-nayef/2015/01/23/2af68108-a308-11e4-91fc-7dff95a14458\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.4ec91d195795](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/meet-the-saudi-royal-familys-rising-star-mohammed-bin-nayef/2015/01/23/2af68108-a308-11e4-91fc-7dff95a14458_story.html?utm_term=.4ec91d195795).

88 Amnesty International, “Saudi Arabia’s ACPRA: How the Kingdom Silences Its Human Rights Activists,” 7-8.

89 *Ibid.*

While al-Bajadi's trial was underway, authorities began interrogating two of ACPRA's most well-known founders, Abdullah al-Hamid and Mohammad al-Qahtani. They were arrested and tried before the criminal court in Riyadh in June 2012 on a variety of charges including, "breaking allegiance to the ruler," "questioning the integrity of officials," "seeking to disrupt security and inciting disorder by calling for demonstrations," and "instigating international organizations against the Kingdom."<sup>90</sup> In March 2013, the court convicted and sentenced al-Hamid to a total of 11 years in prison followed by a five-year travel ban.<sup>91</sup> Al-Qahtani received a sentence of ten years imprisonment and a 10-year travel ban. In addition to imprisoning the ACPRA co-founders, the judge ordered the disbanding of ACPRA, the confiscation of its property, and the removal of its social media accounts.

By the time the court ordered the disbanding of ACPRA, several other members had either been arrested, sentenced, or were on trial. In December 2012, the court of appeals upheld a 15-year sentence and travel ban in the case against al-Rashudi. Two months later, Dr. Abdulkareem al-Khoder was put on trial for charges that included "inciting disorder by calling for demonstrations," "insulting the judicial authority," and "participating in the founding of an unlicensed organization."<sup>92</sup>

Following the closure of ACPRA, authorities continued prosecuting all of its remaining free members. During the second half of 2013, the criminal courts convicted al-Khoder and ACPRA's youngest member, Omar al Said. In 2014, a court of appeal sentenced Fowzan al-Harbi to 10 years in prison, while the cases against ACPRA members Issa al-Hamid, Abdulazziz al-Shubaili, al-Khoder, and al-Bajadi were referred to the SCC for trial.<sup>93</sup>

The Saudi authorities used a stock set of charges in prosecuting almost all of the ACPRA reformers. These charges were typically vague and frequently equated peaceful political activities with terrorism. The most common accusations included "breaking allegiance to and disobeying the ruler" of Saudi Arabia, "questioning the integrity of officials," and "seeking to disrupt security and inciting disorder by calling for demonstrations," as well as "disseminating false information to foreign groups" and "forming or participating in forming an unlicensed organization."<sup>94</sup>

These charges, which prosecutors recycled from case to case, were often based on Saudi Arabia's sweeping and overly broad Anti-Terror Law, Anti-Cybercrime Law, and its Press and Publications Law. The Anti-Terror Law, enacted in January 2014, broadly defines terrorism as "any act intended to disturb the public order of the state ... or insult the reputation of the state or its position."<sup>95</sup> As a result, authorities are empowered to interpret virtually all dissident thought or expression as terrorism, including the lectures and demonstrations of ACPRA. Meanwhile, the Anti-Cybercrime and Press and Publications laws are used to criminalize the publication of materials in print and on social media that are critical of the state. Citing tweets and messages that ACPRA members had posted online, Saudi authorities prosecuted ACPRA activists, including Said al-Omar and Fowzan

90 Ibid.

91 This included a new five-year prison term coupled with a previous six-year sentence from which al-Qahtani had been released through a conditional royal pardon in 2006.

92 Amnesty International, "Saudi Arabia's ACPRA: How the Kingdom Silences Its Human Rights Activists," 8.

93 Several ACPRA members were sentenced multiple times 2012 and 2016 as a result of their cases being tried and then referred to different courts.

94 Amnesty International, "Saudi Arabia's ACPRA: How the Kingdom Silences Its Human Rights Activists," 11-12.

95 Tyler Pry, "Saudi Laws That Violate the Rights of All Sects - Americans for Democracy & Human Rights in Bahrain," Americans for Democracy & Human Rights in Bahrain, July 18, 2016, accessed December 20, 2016, <http://www.adhrb.org/2016/07/saudi-laws-violate-rights-sects/>.

al-Harbi, under article 6 of the Anti-Cybercrime Law, which prohibits producing, preparing, transmitting, or storing materials deemed to disrupt public order.<sup>96</sup>

To prove its case, the prosecution usually submitted a list of actions allegedly committed by the ACPRA defendants to the trial court, which the court then accepted as proof of the defendants' guilt.<sup>97</sup> For example, when members were accused of spreading discord and making public accusations against the authorities, the "proof" listed by the prosecution consisted of an ACPRA statement that criticized Saudi authorities for forcibly suppressing a protest held by the families of prisoners.<sup>98</sup> In its charging documents, prosecutors used inflammatory religious language to paint ACPRA's peaceful reformers as threats to the society.

The following two years saw the remaining free members of ACPRA sentenced. In 2015, the SCC sentenced al-Bajadi, al-Khoder and Abdulrahman al-Hamid to prison terms ranging from four to 10 years, followed by 10-year travel bans.<sup>99</sup> In 2016, Issa al-Hamid, al-Shubaily and Saleh al-Ashwan were sentenced to terms of imprisonment ranging from five to nine years, followed by five to 10-year travel bans and, in the case of al-Shubaily, an eight-year ban on social media.<sup>100</sup> In April 2016, al-Bajadi was released after four years in prison; he remains under a travel ban.<sup>101</sup>

---

96 Amnesty International, "Saudi Arabia's ACPRA: How the Kingdom Silences Its Human Rights Activists," 12-13.

97 Ibid., 12.

98 Ibid.

99 ALQST, "Abdulaziz Al-Shubaili Gets 8-year Sentence: ACPRA Update and Background - ALQST Advocating for Human Rights Saudi Arabia QST," ALQST Advocating for Human Rights Saudi Arabia QST, 2016, accessed December 20, 2016, <https://alqst.org/eng/abdulaziz-al-shubaili-jailed-acpra-update-and-background/>.

100 For Saleh al-Ashwan's sentencing see: Robert Fisk, "Saudi Arabia Cannot Go on Throwing Every Decent Person Who Speaks out on Human Rights into Jail," *The Independent*, October 19, 2016, , accessed December 20, 2016, <http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/saudi-arabia-human-rights-imprisonment-every-decent-man-who-speaks-out-in-jail-robert-fisk-a7369276.html>.

For al-Shubaily and Issa al-Hamid sentencing see: Amnesty International, "URGENT ACTION ANOTHER ACPRA MEMBER SENTENCED TO PRISON," June 17, 2016, accessed December 20, 2016, <https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/MDE2342722016ENGLISH.pdf>.

101 Amnesty International, "Good News! - Saudi Arabia Mohammed Saleh Al-Bajadi Released (UA 91/11)," June 9, 2016, accessed December 20, 2016, <http://www.amnestyusa.org/our-work/latest-victories/good-news-saudi-arabia-mohammed-saleh-al-bajadi-released-ua-9111>.

# The Campaign Against ACPRA: 2011-2016

2011

- March** Authorities summon Abdullah al-Hamid, Mohammad al-Qahtani and Abdulkareem al-Khoder for interrogation.
- 21 March** Security forces arrest Mohammed al-Bajadi after he attended a peaceful protest.

2012

- March** Security forces begin interrogating Abdullah al-Hamid and Mohammad al-Qahtani.
- 10 April** The SCC sentences Mohammed al-Bajadi to four years in prison followed by a five-year travel ban on charges of “insurrection against the ruler, instigating demonstrations, and speaking with foreign [media] channels.”
- 11 June** Authorities charge Abdullah al-Hamid for crimes stemming from his human rights work.
- 18 June** Authorities charge Mohammad al-Qahtani for crimes stemming from his human rights work.
- July** Separate trials begin for Mohammad al-Qahtani and Abdullah al-Hamid.
- 7 July** Security forces arrest Saleh al-Ashwan.
- September** December Mohammad al-Qahtani and Abdullah al-Hamid are tried jointly in the Riyadh Criminal Court
- 12 December** Security forces arrest and detain Suliman al-Rashudi who was previously sentenced to 15 years in prison and had been free awaiting appeal.

2013

- 9 March** The Riyadh Criminal Court sentences Abdullah al-Hamid and Mohammad al-Qahtani to 10 and 11 years in prison, respectively. The Riyadh Criminal Court dissolves ACPRA and confiscates its money and its properties, including its website.
- April** Authorities arrest Omar al-Said.
- 24 April** Authorities arrest Abdulkareem al-Khoder.
- 11 May** Fowzan al-Harbi is interrogated and placed under investigation.
- 10 June** The trial of Omar al-Said begins at the Buraydah Criminal Court. He faces charges of inciting the public and taking part in an unlicensed organization.
- 24 June** The Buraydah Criminal Court sentences Abdulkareem al-Khoder to eight years in prison but his sentence is put on hold as the court orders a new trial.
- November** Authorities summon Abdulaziz al-Shubaily and Issa al-Hamid for interrogation.
- December** Authorities arrest and detain Fowzan al-Harbi. His trial begins at the Riyadh Criminal Court.
- 12 December** The Buraydah Criminal Court sentences Omar al-Said to four years in prison and 300 lashes.

- 17 April** Security forces arrest Dr. Abdulrahman al-Hamid and hold him incommunicado for thirty days.
- June** The trial begins for Issa al-Hamid. The judge transfers his case to the SCC.
- 25 June** After being detained since December 2013, Fowzan al-Harbi is sentenced by the Riyadh Criminal Court sentences to seven years in jail with a subsequent travel ban of equal duration. Fowzan al-Harbi appeals the court's decision.
- September - October** The trial of Abdulaziz al-Shubaily begins at the Buraydah Criminal Court. The public prosecutor transfers his case and he subsequently begins trial at the SCC.
- 19 November** The appellate court increases Fowzan al-Harbi's sentence to ten years in prison followed by a ten-year travel ban, effective upon release.
- 20 November** Mohammed al-Bajadi is retried before SCC on the same charges he faced in 2012.

- January** After his sentence is overturned, Dr. Abdulkareem al-Khoder's trial reopens under the SCC.
- February** Dr. Abdulrahman al-Hamid begins trial before the SCC.
- 5 March** The SCC upholds Mohammed al-Bajadi's four-year prison sentence.
- 13 October** The SCC sentences Abdulrahman al-Hamid to nine years in prison followed by a nine-year travel ban upon release.
- 19 October** After two years in arbitrary detention, Abdulkareem al-Khoder is sentenced by the SCC to ten years in prison followed by a ten-year travel ban and a five-year suspended sentence, provided that he does not resume his human rights advocacy.
- November** Mohammed al-Bajadi is discharged from prison and transferred to a state rehabilitation center for extremists.
- 5 November** Omar al-Said's case is retried before the SCC. He is sentenced to two and a half years in prison and 200 lashes. The Court of Appeal requests the judge increase the sentence
- 22 December** Omar al-Said is released on bail.

- April** Mohammed al-Bajadi is released after months in the Mohammed bin Nayef Center for Counseling and Care.
- 24 April** The SCC sentences Issa al-Hamid to nine years in prison followed by a nine-year travel ban upon release, after a 22-month trial and three postponements of the verdict.
- 29 May** The SCC sentences Abdulaziz al-Shubaily to eight years in prison, followed by an eight-year travel ban, for "calling for a demonstration," "incitement to breach of public order," and "accusing the security forces of exercising repression and torture." He is also banned from writing.
- 5 September** SCC sentences Omar al-Said to seven years in prison and a ten-year travel ban, after appeal.
- 1 December** The SCC increases the sentence of Issa al-Hamid from nine to 11 years.

*\*ACPRA member Saleh al-Ashwan was also sentenced in 2016 by the SCC to five years in prison followed by a five year travel ban. However, sources could not confirm the dates of his trial and sentencing. See end notes for full list of timeline sources.*

## CHAPTER THREE

# ACPRA'S Contributions to the Case for Reform

*“As a constructive actor of change in our community, we and our organization, if we succeed to survive, then we will immediately work on the announced goals, but if we are banned or persecuted, then our attempt has lit two candles at the end of the dark tunnel. The first candle is the literature we have published so people can be more aware of their basic rights regardless of statements by clergy of despotism and narrow, dark minded individuals. The second one is that we have emphasized for our people the importance of social cohesion, civil and peaceful struggle as opposed to violent means, as the only way to get us to our sought goals of rights and freedom.”*

- ACPRA's Foundation Statement, October 2009

The contributions of ACPRA to the struggle for political and civil reform in Saudi Arabia could have ended with the imprisonment of its founders and supporters. However, its statements, letters, petitions and lectures provide a rich foundation from which to advocate for democratic reform within the specific Saudi cultural context. This chapter begins with an examination of the key religious and political tenets upon which ACPRA members based their advocacy efforts and the appeal of these concepts within Saudi society. It then focuses on the way in which the organization broadened its appeal by bringing together individuals with widely divergent backgrounds and orientations. Finally, the chapter highlights the innovative and effective tactics used by ACPRA to spread its ideas and engage both Saudi citizens and members of the international community in its fight for reform.

## ACPRA's Vision of Individual Rights, Constitutional Reform and Civil Society

To fully appreciate the importance of ACPRA's vision for a more just and democratic society, one must understand how the writings, lectures, and positions of its members challenged the ruling establishment's interpretation and application of Islamic principles. Two decades before ACPRA published its foundation statement, co-founder Abdullah al-Hamid was already exploring the ideas that would later guide ACPRA's work. In 1995 al-Hamid published a study titled, “Human Rights between the justice of Islam and despotism of the Rulers.”<sup>102</sup> Grounding his thesis in Islamic juristic resources, al-Hamid disputed the notion that Islam does not concern itself with human rights.<sup>103</sup> According to al-Hamid's writings, through the worship of God as the ultimate authority, Islam frees men from their subservience to other men who abuse their positions of power.<sup>104</sup> Islamic values and laws, al-Hamid argued, function to protect people and preserve their individual dignity. Human rights, therefore, are an essential component of each individual's humanity.<sup>105</sup>

This core concept is reflected in ACPRA's foundation statement, which heavily emphasized the importance of individual rights. ACPRA vowed to:

<sup>102</sup> Mansoor Jassem Alshamsi, *Islam and Political Reform in Saudi Arabia: The Quest for Political Change and Reform*, 43.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.



“Work and act through using the motto ‘know your rights’ to enhance people’s awareness and educate the civilians on their basic rights enabling them to interact with each other as equal co-citizens but also with the system in peaceful and constructive manner for the best of our nation.”<sup>106</sup>

ACPRA’s emphasis on the power and rights of individuals clashed with the kingdom’s official religious doctrine which emphasizes submission and faithfulness to the monarchy. In their work, senior Wahhabi state clerics interpret Islamic doctrine to perpetuate and promote this narrative of subservience. “They [State Clerics] view the relationship between the king and the people as one of a benevolent patron or even shepherd (*al-ra’i*) who rules over his obedient flock (*al-ra’iyya*),” Islamic studies professor Joas Wagemakers wrote in a 2012 report for the Netherlands Institute of International Relations.<sup>107</sup>

Rejecting this narrative of subservience, ACPRA worked to spread human rights awareness to all segments of Saudi society, regardless of sect, class or gender. In its foundation statement, ACPRA declared its intent to work to secure the “rights of disenfranchised minorities and neglected regions enabling them to participate fully in the development of our society that needs all its human resources.”<sup>108</sup> For ACPRA members, this notion of equality was not just a tenant of international treaties and declarations – it was rooted in Islamic religious texts. For example, in his discussions of universal rights, al-Hamid supported the principle that the legitimate rights of Muslims and non-Muslims are equally worthy of protection by citing the Quranic verse “To you be your way and to me mine.”<sup>109</sup>

In conjunction with its efforts to secure individual rights, ACPRA advocated for an elected parliament and a constitutional monarchy. Years before ACPRA announced its commitment to “an elected legislature from the general public (men and women) that can monitor the executive branch of the government,”<sup>110</sup> ACPRA co-founders, including Suliman al-Rashudi and Abdullah al-Hamid, were advocating for these constitutional reforms.<sup>111</sup> Like their western counterparts, Saudi reformers sought a constitutional monarchy to protect the sovereignty of the people against authoritarian rule. In an initiative announced on 12 June 2012, members of ACPRA, including Suliman al-Rashudi, Abdullah al-Hamid, Mohammad Fahad al-Qahtani and Abdulkareem Yousef al-Kathar, explained:

“Today, the people are in need of a new social contract, one between the reformed Saudi regime and free people. This can only be done through a constitutional governance that draws its legitimacy from the people. The government must be elected, representative of the people’s will, and held accountable to them alone.”<sup>112</sup>

106 Saudi Civil and Political Rights Association (ACPRA), “Saudi Civil and Political Rights Association: An Establishing Declaration.”

107 Joas Wagemakers, “Arguing for Change under Benevolent Oppression,” 28.

108 “Saudi Civil and Political Rights Association; An Establishing Declaration.” Saudi Civil and Political Rights Association (ACPRA),

109 Mansoor Jassem Alshamsi, *Islam and Political Reform in Saudi Arabia: The Quest for Political Change and Reform*, 43.

110 Saudi Civil and Political Rights Association (ACPRA), “Saudi Civil and Political Rights Association: An Establishing Declaration.”

111 See: Americans for Democracy & Human Rights in Bahrain (ADHRB), “The Saudi Association for Civil and Political Rights’ Suliman Al-Rashudi,” November 04, 2016, accessed December 21, 2016, <http://www.adhrb.org/2016/11/11287/>, and Americans for Democracy & Human Rights in Bahrain (ADHRB),

“The Saudi Association for Civil and Political Rights’ Abdullah Al-Hamid,” October 25, 2016, accessed December 21, 2016, <http://www.adhrb.org/2016/10/saudi-association-civil-political-rights-abdullah-al-hamid/>.

112 الجمعية السعودية (ACPRA), “ACPRA Calls Upon Saudi Citizens to Demand Allegiance Conditions,” Google Groups, June 18, 2012, accessed December 21, 2016, <https://groups.google.com/d/forum/acpra>. جمعية الحقوق المدنية والسياسية في

ACPRA strengthened its call for a constitutional monarchy and elected representation by invoking the concept of *Shura* (consultation). In the Sunni Islamic tradition, leaders are expected to rely on consultation with their respective community (*ummah*) as an integral part of their decision-making process. In Saudi Arabia, however, *Shura* is limited to consultation with the *Majlis al-Shura*, Saudi Arabia's "legislative body." Its elite group of members are appointed by the King and do not reflect the views and concerns of the public. ACPRA argued that the decision-making process of the Saudi monarchy was a perversion of *Shura* and thus called into question its legitimacy:

"An authoritarian ruler is one who lacks a legitimate claim to power, i.e. disregards the requirement of consultation (*Shura*), and violates the legitimate role of a ruler as being just. Any rule that does not involve consultation with constituents is illegitimate and goes against the prophet's tradition. These illegitimate authoritarian rulers use the phrase 'Islam is our constitution,' and they are either unaware of its meaning or they purposefully use it in order to fool people by using religion. Legitimate Allegiance (Bay'ah) in Islam is between the people and their ruler."<sup>113</sup>

ACPRA's invocation of the concept of *Shura* in support of its call for a constitutional monarchy echoed the arguments advanced in the earlier reform initiatives as a part of the short-lived "Riyadh Spring." As discussed in Chapter One, in January 2003, Saudi reform activists, including ACPRA co-founders Suliman al-Rashudi and Abdullah al-Hamid, signed the petition "A Vision for the Present and Future of the Nation" which similarly emphasized the rule of *Shura*. The petition stated:

"Justice is the basis of rule, God has ordained social justice, [which] can only be achieved through *shura* (consultation)... *Shura* cannot be achieved in a practical sense until the following conditions are met: a nation of institutions and of constitutionality."<sup>114</sup>

In discussing his reliance on the rule of *Shura* in arguing for constitutional reform, al-Hamid explained, "I prefer the use of 'shura' to the use of 'democracy' because we need something that is the product of our own culture, not imported concepts."<sup>115</sup>

The third pillar of ACPRA's mission was the creation of a more open civil society in Saudi Arabia in which people are free to "establish political associations, parties and practice their activities in the public sphere."<sup>116</sup> ACPRA's efforts once again collided with the state-sanctioned religious and political discourse in Saudi Arabia, which views an engaged public as a threat to stability. The Saudi government maintains strict control over civil society through its licensing requirements and bans on public protest. The government outlaws any unlicensed civil society organization, while making it virtually impossible for political groups like ACPRA to obtain a license. Knowing that it would never be granted a license, ACPRA appealed directly to the king for recognition when it announced its formation. In response, the government prosecuted and imprisoned ACPRA members for setting up and participating in an "illegal organization."

113 Ibid.

114 Raed Abdulaiziz Alhargan, "Saudi Arabia: Civil Rights and Local Actors," *Middle East Policy* XIX, no. 1 (Spring 2012), accessed December 21, 2016, <http://www.mepec.org/journal/middle-east-policy-archives/saudi-arabia-civil-rights-and-local-actors>.

115 Stéphane Lacroix, "Between Islamists and Liberals: Saudi Arabia's New "Islam Liberal" Reformists," *Middle East Journal* 58, no. 3 (Summer 2004): 350, accessed December 21, 2016, [http://www.academia.edu/3292248/Between\\_Islamists\\_and\\_Liberals\\_Saudi\\_Arabias\\_New\\_Islamo-Liberal\\_Reformists](http://www.academia.edu/3292248/Between_Islamists_and_Liberals_Saudi_Arabias_New_Islamo-Liberal_Reformists).

116 Saudi Civil and Political Rights Association (ACPRA), "Saudi Civil and Political Rights Association: An Establishing Declaration."

In keeping with its narrative of subservience, Saudi authorities, including the MOI and the ruling religious clerics, also invoke their interpretation of *Sharia* to suppress public protests.<sup>117</sup> In March 2011, as Arab Spring demonstrations were taking place in the region, the Saudi Council of Senior Religious Scholars, the kingdom's highest religious body, imposed a ban on all public protests claiming they "contradict *Sharia* law and the values and traditions of Saudi society."<sup>118</sup> The decree contended that Saudi Arabia was "founded on the Qur'an, the Sunna, allegiance (*bay'a*) [to the ruler] and the necessity of community and obedience. Reform could only take place through advice (*nasihah*) and not through demonstrations and means that could divide the community."<sup>119</sup> In announcing the ban, the Council also issued a thinly-veiled warning to ACPRA and other Saudi dissident groups, stating "that reform will be accomplished through the *Sharia* methods and not by issuing and collecting signatures on intimidating and incendiary statements."<sup>120</sup> For the Saudi establishment, "*Sharia* methods" were limited to methods that did not openly challenge the king.

In countering the government's restrictions on public discourse and dissent, ACPRA argued that a more open civil society would foster "a spirit of democracy and social cohesion in the KSA."<sup>121</sup> Conversely, the continued suppression of public venues for peaceful expression, according to ACPRA, "may result in turbulences, hatreds, social divisions, sectarian, religious extremism and repulsion."<sup>122</sup> ACPRA's foundation statement reasoned, "It is a common sense that when people are deprived from expressing their sentiments publicly, they may resort to establishing secret and violent organizations."<sup>123</sup>

Once again, ACPRA members drew on Islamic principles in advocating for reform. In his lectures and writings, al-Hamid defined the concept of *jihād* as a peaceful struggle against oppression through civil society and demonstrations, rather than as acts of violence. According to al-Hamid, in order to protect those who wish to advance justice, people must form civic organizations.<sup>124</sup> These organizations serve as a means to educate and foster a culture of informed political participation and open discourse. Saudis should not view ACPRA's call to establish civil society organizations as an endorsement of divisive party politics. Rather, as al-Hamid explained, empowering society in all its diversity will help move Saudi society away from a sectarian culture towards one based on an all-encompassing notion of citizenship.<sup>125</sup> In the absence of an open civil society, groups risk becoming self-contained echo chambers with no way to implement their ideas other than by force.<sup>126</sup>

ACPRA member and former judge Suliman al-Rashudi similarly argued that the right to engage in peaceful demonstrations was not just compatible with Islam, but was in fact a religious duty. In December 2012, while he was on trial for his work with ACPRA, al-Rashudi used a break in the

117 Issam Saliba, "Saudi Arabia: The Regime Invokes Sharia Law to Prevent Public Protest," *Global Legal Monitor*, Library of Congress, March 10, 2011, accessed December 21, 2016, <http://www.loc.gov/law/foreign-news/article/saudi-arabia-the-regime-invokes-sharia-law-to-prevent-public-protest/> and "Saudi Arabia Imposes Ban on All Protests," BBC News, March 05, 2011, accessed December 21, 2016, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-12656744>."

118 "Saudi Arabia Imposes Ban on All Protests," BBC News, March 05, 2011, , accessed November 2016, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-12656744>.

119 Joas Wagemakers, "Arguing for Change under Benevolent Oppression," 29.

120 Issam Saliba, "Saudi Arabia: The Regime Invokes Sharia Law to Prevent Public Protest."

121 Saudi Civil and Political Rights Association (ACPRA), "Saudi Civil and Political Rights Association: An Establishing Declaration."

122 Ibid.

123 Ibid.

124 Madawi Al-Rasheed, *Contesting the Saudi State: Islamic Voices from a New Generation* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 228.

125 Ibid.

126 Madawi al-Rasheed, *Muted Modernists*, 68.

trial proceedings to deliver a public lecture in Riyadh on the legality of demonstrations and their validity in Islam. Rashudi explained that “the call for peaceful demonstrations to lift injustice and tyranny and to remove corruption ... is a call for the good and to promote virtue and prevent vice. These are divinely ordained duties for all believers ... Peaceful demonstrations therefore are an expression and a means to these legitimate ends.”<sup>127</sup> Saudi authorities arrested al-Rashudi the day after his lecture was uploaded to YouTube.

## **ACPRA’s Diverse Membership Broadened its Appeal**

ACPRA’s contribution to the struggle for a more open, inclusive and freer Saudi society went beyond its advocacy efforts. By bringing together preeminent scholars, activists, public figures and students from widely divergent backgrounds and age groups to serve as ACPRA’s co-founders, the organization itself embodied its pluralistic vision. Up until the establishment of ACPRA, reform groups in Saudi Arabia rarely joined forces in any sustained effort and often fell prey to internal philosophical divisions. For example, the CDLR, the leading 1990s opposition group discussed in Chapter One, disbanded over ideological and operational disagreements between its co-founders, al-Masari and Sa’ad al-Fagih.

Commenting on the historical failure of reform groups in Saudi Arabia to bridge internal divisions, Saudi historian Daryl Champion wrote in 2003:

“Opposition in Saudi Arabia since the Gulf Crisis, has with the possible exception of the kingdom’s Shia minority, been heterogeneous, fragmented, disorganized and unprepared. Although this has long been recognized by Saudi dissidents, it is unlikely to change in the foreseeable future. Religiously-based opposition has presented by far the greatest challenge to the Al Saud. However, opinions run strong where ideology is concerned, and compromise in the greater interest of unity in a common cause appears to elude those who might otherwise regard each other as colleagues.”<sup>128</sup>

ACPRA upended this paradigm. It successfully united individuals like veteran Islamist scholars Abdullah al-Hamid and Sheikh Suliman al-Rashudi, and Mohammad Fahad al-Qahtani, an American-educated economics professor who cited George Washington and Martin Luther King as sources of inspiration<sup>129</sup> and was named among the top 50 most influential global thinkers by *Foreign Policy* magazine in 2012.<sup>130</sup> Members of ACPRA drew on their diverse backgrounds to advocate in more powerful and far-reaching ways. By grounding their discourse on human rights in Islamic principles, ACPRA made it more difficult for the Saudi government to disparage and dismiss the group as westernized elites espousing ideas that are inimical to Saudi Arabia’s religious culture. At the same time, ACPRA’s invocation of international treaties and universal human rights principles, and its work with international bodies like the UN, allowed ACPRA to expand its reach to the more secular-leaning segments of Saudi society, including Saudi youth. It also gave ACPRA greater credibility and appeal as a human rights organization in the eyes of the international community and the international press.

127 “Saudi Arabia’s ACPRA: How the Kingdom Silences Its Human Rights Activists,” Amnesty International.

128 Champion, *The Paradoxical Kingdom*, 249.

129 Roy Gutman, “In Saudi Arabia, Advocating Peaceful Change Leads to Lengthy Prison Terms for Two Dissidents,” McClatchy Newspapers, April 30, 2013, accessed December 21, 2016, <http://www.mcclatchydc.com/news/nation-world/world/article24748657.html>.

130 Alicia P.Q. Wittmeyer, “The FP Top 100 Global Thinkers,” *Foreign Policy*, November 26, 2012, accessed December 21, 2016, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2012/11/26/the-fp-top-100-global-thinkers-2/>.

## Maximizing Message in a Restricted Society

---

ACPRA's impact on the Saudi reform movement was not only a function of the effective way it drew upon Islamic and universal human rights principles to craft its platform. ACPRA proved itself to be equally skilled in capitalizing on both social media and the trial of its two most famous co-founders to deliver its message to the broadest audience possible. One Twitter user, Ahmed al-Massary, summed up ACPRA's success in using the trial of al-Qahtani and al-Hamid to spread its ideas, stating that, "They may have thought only 50 people were in the courtroom, but 50,000 of us were in attendance [online]. This is how flakes turn to snowballs."<sup>131</sup>

With over 2.4 million users, Saudi Arabia has the highest number of Twitter users of any country in the Arab world.<sup>132</sup> The country also accounts for ten percent of all Facebook users in the region and has the highest number of YouTube users per capita.<sup>133</sup> From the outset, ACPRA, whose members included young activists fully conversant in social media, made a concerted effort to reach potential followers by communicating in the virtual sphere. Beginning in 2009, ACPRA posted its research papers, letters, pamphlets, lectures and other important documents on its web page. It made videos of lectures and workshops on key topics, such as al-Rashudi's 2012 lecture on the legality of peaceful demonstrations under Islam, posted these videos on YouTube and circulated them through Twitter. Within the safety of their homes, Saudi citizens could learn about ACPRA's message on human rights, ask questions and follow the activities of the organization. For ACPRA, social media was not just a means to reach an audience, but a way for supporters to contact the organization. For example, when al-Qahtani and al-Hamid needed a lawyer to represent them, they advertised on Twitter and Abdulaziz al-Hussan came forward to offer his counsel.<sup>134</sup>

ACPRA was not unique in its use of social media. Saudis from all spectrums are adept at using the internet to advance their messages and network with supporters. What distinguishes ACPRA from other human rights organizations and opposition movements was the way in which it utilized social media during the trial of al-Hamid and al-Qahtani to broadcast what became the most impactful lectures to reach the Saudi public and international community on the rights of the accused and the legitimacy of the Saudi monarchy.

## Putting the Court and King on Trial

---

In March 2012, authorities began to question al-Qahtani and al-Hamid, and in June 2012 separate trial proceedings were instituted against the two men in the Riyadh criminal court. Three months later, they were joined together in a single trial. The government leveled a series of charges against al-Qahtani and al-Hamid, including "breaking allegiance to the ruler," "questioning the integrity of officials," "seeking to disrupt security and inciting disorder by calling for demonstrations," and "instigating international organizations against the Kingdom."<sup>135</sup>

---

131 Nora Abdulakarim, "Trial of Saudi Civil Rights Activists Mohammad Al-Qahtani & Abdullah Al-Hamid," *Muftah*, September 3, 2012, accessed December 21, 2016, <http://muftah.org/trial-of-saudi-civil-rights-activists-mohammad-al-qahtani-abdullah-al-hamid/#.WEsdstUrLIV>.

132 "Saudi Arabia Profile - Media," BBC News, January 23, 2015, accessed December 21, 2016, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-14703480>.

133 Ibid.

134 Abdulaziz al-Hussan, Interview by author, Initial Research Meeting, Washington DC, September 21, 2016.

135 Amnesty International, "Saudi Arabia's ACPRA: How the Kingdom Silences Its Human Rights Activists," 8.

ACPRA immediately began to circulate the accusations while the government rushed to block internet links to the charges.<sup>136</sup> The defendants published their replies to each charge in detailed pamphlets, which they used in court sessions and incorporated in their lectures.<sup>137</sup> The trial quickly became the organization's biggest opportunity to confront the government and to educate the public on the judiciary's misuse of the law and its distortion of religious concepts to punish ACPRA members for their peaceful protests.

The first and most critical challenge the two ACPRA co-founders faced was to keep the trial open to the public. Before al-Qahtani and al-Hamid's first joint trial session on 1 September 2012, al-Hamid invited observers over Twitter to attend<sup>138</sup> and around 50 followers and at least one Saudi journalist crowded the courtroom.<sup>139</sup> At the conclusion of the session, the judge announced his intent to bar the public from future proceedings. Al-Hamid responded:

"You are just trying to intimidate us! Why don't you keep our future sessions open to the public, and allow pictures to be taken? Why not even provide chairs for supporters who decide to come? You cannot call yourself an independent judge when you are susceptible to governmental pressure. A secret trial cannot be fair; justice will not be reached in this case. A political defendant is only protected as much as he is publicly seen, holding our sessions secretly is a violation of our rights."<sup>140</sup>

In two subsequent closed-door sessions, al-Qahtani and al-Hamid refused to participate unless the trial was opened to the public.<sup>141</sup> They tweeted their refusal to a growing number of followers, many of whom camped outside the courthouse and dispersed only when riot police arrived.<sup>142</sup> The court finally relented.

As Roy Gutman, foreign editor of the McClatchy News Service, reported, the case against al-Qahtani and al-Hamid read "not like a terror plot but a mission statement for a civil liberties group."<sup>143</sup> The first joint session of the trial commenced with al-Qahtani's statement of defense, in which he condemned the human and civil rights violations in Saudi Arabia. Al-Qahtani raised the recent cases of ACPRA member Saleh al-Ashwan, arrested in July 2012, and Mohammed al-Bajadi, who was sentenced in March 2012 to four years in prison, both for their involvement in civil rights activism.<sup>144</sup> Al-Qahtani then defended against the charge that his political activism impeded the development of Saudi society, arguing it was the MOI's practice of arbitrary detention that was corrosive.

During al-Hamid's defense, the academic took the opportunity to lecture on the merits of peaceful protest and the importance in Islam of "speaking a just word before a tyrant."<sup>145</sup> After the judge chastised al-Hamid for promoting protest without the consent of the monarchy, al-Hamid pivoted to the court's admitted partiality to the monarchy:

136 Nora Abdulakarim, "Trial of Saudi Civil Rights Activists Mohammad Al-Qahtani & Abdullah Al-Hamid."

137 Madawi Al Rasheed, *Muted Modernists*, 70.

138 عبدالله الحامد, "السبت ٢٣/٠١/٤١ هـ موعد الجلسة الثانية لمحاكمة د. محمد القحطاني ومحاكمتي/وننتظر من المهتمين الحضور وما هو أكثر وأكبر وأهم من الحضور" Twitter, August 28, 2012, accessed December 21, 2016, [https://twitter.com/Abubelal\\_1951/status/240364716046811137](https://twitter.com/Abubelal_1951/status/240364716046811137).

139 Nora Abdulakarim, "Trial of Saudi Civil Rights Activists Mohammad Al-Qahtani & Abdullah Al-Hamid."

140 Ibid.

141 Osama Khalid, "Saudi Arabia: Reformist Figures Refuse Secret Trial," *Global Voices*, September 8, 2012, accessed December 21, 2016, <https://globalvoices.org/2012/09/08/saudi-arabia-reformist-figures-refuse-secret-trial/>.

142 Ibid.

143 Roy Gutman, "In Saudi Arabia, Advocating Peaceful Change Leads to Lengthy Prison Terms for Two Dissidents."

144 Nora Abdulakarim, "Trial of Saudi Civil Rights Activists Mohammad Al-Qahtani & Abdullah Al-Hamid."

145 Ibid.

“If the judiciary is not independent, it will only function as a symbol of oppression. How could charges of impeding development be entertained by a court that is fully aware that those accused of such have no power to do so? A just judicial system is the true basis of development, stability, and the mark of a civilized state.”<sup>146</sup>

The subsequent trial sessions continued with lectures from al-Qahtani and al-Hamid, and heated exchanges with the judge. With each hearing the audience grew, from around 50 observers in attendance during the first joint session to over 130 when the verdict was delivered.<sup>147</sup>

Al-Qahtani and al-Hamid dominated the proceedings. They were dynamic, learned and defiant. For example, during the ninth trial session, al-Hamid cited the Saudi government’s opposition to Syria’s Bashar al-Assad to illustrate a case in which the government recognized that it is legitimate to protest unjust rule.<sup>148</sup> When the judge responded that the Assad government was a product of democracy, al-Qahtani stepped in to lecture the court and trial-watchers on the military coup that brought the Assads to power.<sup>149</sup> In the final court hearing, al-Hamid produced his book, *Words are More Powerful Than Bullets*, telling the judge and courtroom observers that Saudi human rights activists had been convicted for simply possessing a copy.<sup>150</sup>

Since both defendants were at liberty, they used the time between the court sessions to mobilize their supporters. Describing the scene before the opening trial, observers were struck by the atmosphere of anticipation. Summarizing firsthand accounts of the trial Saudi blogger Nora Abdulkareem wrote, “Rows of supporters formed outside the Riyadh courtroom as they waited for the arrival of activists Mohammad al-Qahtani and Abdullah al-Hamid. Upon their entrance through the courthouse’s door, hands were shaken and encouraging smiles were exchanged.”<sup>151</sup> In addition to the action in the courtroom, the surrounding courtyard and pavement were venues where ACPRA members and supporters engaged in conversation about the proceedings inside and shared updates with the public. Both Abdullah al-Hamid and Mohammad al-Qahtani tweeted from the pavement outside the court and took photos with their supporters who accompanied them.<sup>152</sup>

The coverage of the trial helped spread the debate that was playing out in the courtroom to segments of society that otherwise might not have been aware of the case.<sup>153</sup> The hashtag of “Trial of al-Hamid and al-Qahtani” spread quickly on Twitter.<sup>154</sup> International media, including correspondents from Al Jazeera, Sky News, and Agence France Press, reported on the proceedings, giving each trial session an unprecedented amount of foreign coverage. Official Saudi media initially ignored the trial, but because of the trial’s high media profile, it was later compelled to cover them and the resulting sentences.<sup>155</sup> In its reports, the official Saudi press attempted to avoid

146 Ibid.

147 Osama Khalid, “Saudi Court Sentences Reformists to 10 and 11 Years in Prison,” Global Voices, 2013, accessed December 21, 2016, <https://globalvoices.org/2013/03/09/saudi-court-sentences-reformists-to-10-and-11-years-in-prison/>.

148 Osama Khalid, “Saudi Judge: Bashar Al-Assad Is the Outcome of Democracy .;,” Global Voices, December 15, 2012, accessed December 21, 2016, <https://globalvoices.org/2012/12/15/saudi-judge-bashar-al-assad-is-the-outcome/>.

149 Ibid.

150 Osama Khalid, “Saudi Activist Trial Hearing Concludes,” Global Voices, December 29, 2012, accessed December 21, 2016, <https://globalvoices.org/2012/12/29/saudi-activist-trial-hearing-concluded/>.

151 Nora Abdulakarim, “Trial of Saudi Civil Rights Activists Mohammad Al-Qahtani & Abdullah Al-Hamid.”

152 Madawi al-Rasheed, *Muted Modernists*, 70-71.

153 Ibid.

154 Nora Abdulakarim, “Trial of Saudi Civil Rights Activists Mohammad Al-Qahtani & Abdullah Al-Hamid.”

155 Madawi Al Rasheed, *Muted Modernists*, 71.

mentioning the names of the defendants in an effort to deny them publicity and celebrity status.<sup>156</sup>

Like all of ACPRA's co-founders, al-Qahtani and al-Hamid were fully aware from the beginning of the price they would pay for establishing ACPRA and challenging the kingdom's human rights abuses. Speaking to Time Magazine while he was under investigation by the MOI in May 2012, al-Qahtani explained that he was prepared to face imprisonment and expressed satisfaction with the organization's accomplishments:

“Even if they throw us in [prison] for 10, 15 years. Over the course of two and a half years we have done whatever it takes. We have done what we could. We are ready to go to prison now ... The documents we have collected, the awareness campaigns that we have done, the reports we published ... these activities did not exist in the country before - We have done it ... if we go to prison for 15 or even 20 years then it's worth it.”<sup>157</sup>

On 9 March 2013, the judge convicted al-Qahtani and al-Hamid and ordered the disbanding of ACPRA. Finding that the presence of the two men outside of prison was “dangerous,” the court ordered their immediate arrest.<sup>158</sup> In a practical sense the group was defeated, yet they had accomplished a major goal. ACPRA successfully spread the culture of rights and peaceful resistance to authoritarian rule, using the kingdom's own judicial institutions as its vehicle.<sup>159</sup>

Saudi Arabia's sweeping restrictions on assembly and free speech make it difficult to quantify the extent of ACPRA's appeal and reach within Saudi society. Nevertheless, the reaction to the conviction and imprisonment of al-Qahtani and al-Hamid and the closure of ACPRA sheds light on the group's impact and resonance amongst Saudis. A Twitter poll created by a prominent Saudi economist and blogger, Essam al-Zamil, surveyed over 10,000 users to determine the public's response to the judge's verdict and sentencing. As of 10 March 2013, 85% of those surveyed responded that the court's ruling was unjust.<sup>160</sup>

In late 2013, while al-Hamid was serving his sentence, activists from Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states launched an online campaign to nominate him for the Nobel Peace Prize.<sup>161</sup> As part of their effort to gather signatures in support of the nomination, al-Hamid's supporters circulated his biography, lectures, and writings. Though the campaign did not result in a nomination, it refocused attention on al-Hamid and al-Qahtani's unjust imprisonment, drew support from high profile Gulf civil society activists and intellectuals, and further spread ACPRA's vision and literature among the public. In a testament to ACPRA's legacy and continuing popularity, images of a shackled al-Hamid preparing for Friday prayers in prison, reportedly circulate outside his prison walls.<sup>162</sup> While nearly all of ACPRA's founders remain behind bars, young online activists, often using pseudonyms, “regularly run internet campaigns to free the reformers and disseminate reports written by organizations such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch.”<sup>163</sup>

---

156 Ibid.

157 Jacob Templin, “Saudi Arabia Jails Two Leading Activists for 10 Year,” *Time*, March 11, 2013, accessed December 21, 2016, <http://world.time.com/2013/03/11/saudi-arabia-jails-two-leading-activists-for-10-years/>.

158 Osama Khalid, “Saudi Court Sentences Reformists to 10 and 11 Years in Prison.”

159 Madawi al-Rasheed, *Muted Modernists*, 72.

160 Eman Al Nafjan, “Public reaction to ACPRA trial,” Saudiwoman's Weblog, March 10, 2013, accessed December 21, 2016, <https://saudiwoman.me/2013/03/10/public-reponse-to-acpra-trial/>.

161 “Al-Hamid for Nobel Peace Prize,” 2013, accessed December 21, 2016, <http://alhamid4nobel.com/>.

162 Madawi al-Rasheed, *Muted Modernists*, 72.

163 Madawi Al-Rasheed, “Saudi activists – who are they and what do they want?,” *New Internationalist*, March 2016, accessed December 21, 2016, <https://newint.org/features/2016/03/01/saudi-activists/>.



The loyal supporters who preserve ACPRA's legacy are unlikely to mobilize a large segment of Saudis society in favor of democratic reform in the immediate future. For all ACPRA's accomplishments, its activities did not ignite widespread public demonstrations. Many Saudis remain wary of such change, especially after the failures of the Arab Spring. But continued discussion of ACPRA's ideas behind closed doors serves as an important reminder of the fundamental nature of human rights and the validity of political reform. ACPRA's rich scholarship, its inspiring vision of reform and the way in which its diverse co-founders united to effectively and relentlessly advocate for the rights of all Saudi citizens provide a fertile basis for new Saudi activists to build upon as they continue to press for peaceful change.

## CHAPTER FOUR

# Countering Extremism and Promoting Peaceful Reform in Saudi Arabia – U.S. Policy Recommendations

### Overview

---

For over 70 years, Saudi Arabia has been a strong U.S. ally in the Middle East, based on mutual security and economic interests. Dating back to the Cold War, Saudi Arabia has been seen as crucial to the U.S. strategy of maintaining global balance between allies of the West and its adversaries. Today, while many policymakers continue to use regional balancing as the primary lens from which to conduct U.S. relations with Saudi Arabia, others call for a reevaluation of the “special relationship” between the two countries.<sup>164</sup> These critics cite the kingdom’s repeated human rights abuses, repressive policies, and government-sanctioned ideologies which promote intolerance and extremism.

U.S. Presidents from George W. Bush to Barack Obama have acknowledged that Saudi Arabia must embark on domestic political reform in order to effectively combat the rise in terrorism. In a 2003 speech to the National Endowment for Democracy, President Bush congratulated Saudi Arabia for its stated intent to convene municipal elections, while prodding the government to grant Saudi citizens greater freedom of expression and political participation. The President stated, “By giving the Saudi people a greater role in their own society, the Saudi government can demonstrate true leadership in the region.”<sup>165</sup> Later President Bush noted, “Suppressing dissent only increases radicalism. The long-term stability of any government depends on being open to change and responsive to citizens.”<sup>166</sup> Echoing this sentiment in a broader context, in February 2015 President Obama launched the Countering Violent Extremism initiative, explaining, “When people are oppressed, and human rights denied—particularly along sectarian lines or ethnic line—when dissent is silenced, it feeds violent extremism. It creates an environment that is ripe for terrorists to exploit.”<sup>167</sup>

ACPRA likewise recognized “that when people are deprived from expressing their sentiments publicly, they may resort to establishing secret and violent organizations.”<sup>168</sup> ACPRA served as a counterweight to violent extremism in its promotion of “plurality, tolerance, and civilized dialogues” and its unwavering commitment to peaceful reform.<sup>169</sup> Unfortunately, in keeping with the general reluctance of the United States to engage the Saudi government on human rights

---

164 Ryan Suto, “America’s Outdated Special Relationship with Saudi Arabia,” *Foreign Policy In Focus*, September 30, 2016, accessed December 21, 2016, <http://fpif.org/americas-outdated-special-relationship-saudi-arabia/>.

165 Dan Froomkin, “Distancing Himself From the Saudis,” *The Washington Post*, June 30, 2004, accessed December 16, 2016, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A17365-2004Jun30.html>.

166 “Transcript: Bush Urges Mideast to Embrace Democracy,” *The Washington Post*, June 29, 2004, accessed December 21, 2016, [http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A14293-2004Jun29\\_4.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A14293-2004Jun29_4.html).

167 “Remarks by the President at the Summit on Countering Violent Extremism,” The White House, February 19, 2015, accessed December 21, 2016, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2015/02/19/remarks-president-summit-countering-violent-extremism-february-19-2015>.

168 Saudi Civil and Political Rights Association (ACPRA), “Saudi Civil and Political Rights Association: An Establishing Declaration.”

169 Ibid.

issues, U.S. officials did not condemn the imprisonment of ACPR members but instead issued a generic statement of concern.<sup>170</sup>

Before a visit to Saudi Arabia in January 2015, President Obama told CNN's Fareed Zakaria that when dealing with the Saudis, "Sometimes we have to balance our need to speak to them about human rights issues with immediate concerns that we have in terms of countering terrorism or dealing with regional stability."<sup>171</sup> Earlier that month, Saudi authorities had publicly flogged Saudi blogger Raif Badawi as a part of his punishment for creating a website intended to open discussions on religious and political issues.<sup>172</sup> Though the United States condemned the lashings,<sup>173</sup> President Obama was notably silent on the issue during his visit to the kingdom. While this may have been out of respect for the recently deceased King Abdullah, the President's silence fits a general pattern wherein U.S. leadership is hesitant to publically raise specific concerns regarding human rights abuses and the treatment of peaceful activists.<sup>174</sup>

The perception that, when it comes to Saudi Arabia, the U.S. government relegates human rights abuses to the backburner disappoints many Saudi Arabia activists who see the positive impact of foreign pressure in specific cases. For example, after receiving widespread international media attention, the Saudi government indefinitely postponed the second round of Badawi's floggings. As one Saudi activist, who spoke on the condition of anonymity out of concerns of government retribution, explained to the Washington Post, "Global attention is the only leverage we have as subjects in an absolute monarchy."<sup>175</sup>

The United States should explore opportunities to lend public and private support to the efforts of peaceful human rights reformers within Saudi Arabia. As the kingdom's crackdown on advocates of reform intensifies, the United States should monitor the cases of Saudi political prisoners and others detained for exercising universal human rights and, with permission from the prisoners, call for the release of imprisoned activists by name. Similarly, the United States should build upon its 2013 agreement with Saudi Arabia to allow foreign missions to independently monitor trials in cases that do not involve their citizens by formalizing the practice of sending U.S. embassy or consulate officials to attend the trials of human rights activists. By more consistently observing and condemning trials that violate human rights and international standards of due process, the United States can send a message that Saudi officials cannot simply sweep government abuses under the rug when high-level foreign officials are in town. More importantly, consistent support by the United States of individuals targeted for advocating for peaceful reform keeps their efforts alive. As Adam Coogole of Human Rights Watch explains, "Fighting for human rights reforms is

170 "Sentencing of Saudi Civil and Political Rights Association Members to Prison," U.S. Department of State, October 21, 2015, accessed December 21, 2016, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2015/10/248439.htm>.

171 Jeremy Diamond, "Obama on balancing the U.S.-Saudi relationship," CNN, January 27, 2015, accessed December 16, 2016, <http://www.cnn.com/2015/01/27/politics/obama-saudi-arabia-zakaria/>.

172 Ian Black, "Global outrage at Saudi Arabia as jailed blogger receives public flogging," *The Guardian*, January 11, 2015, accessed December 21, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jan/11/flogging-global-outrage-saudi-arabia-silent>.

173 Department Spokesperson Jen Psaki, "Statement on the Sentence of Saudi Human Rights Activist Raif Badawi," U.S. Department of State, January 08, 2015, , accessed December 21, 2016, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2015/01/235704.htm>.

174 Adam Taylor, "The facts — and a few myths — about Saudi Arabia and human rights," *The Washington Post*, February 9, 2015, accessed December 21, 2016, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2015/02/09/the-facts-and-a-few-myths-about-saudi-arabia-and-human-rights/?utm\\_term=.bde16a5bce56](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2015/02/09/the-facts-and-a-few-myths-about-saudi-arabia-and-human-rights/?utm_term=.bde16a5bce56).

175 Adam Taylor, "The facts — and a few myths — about Saudi Arabia and human rights."

a risky business in Saudi Arabia, and the absence of public support from the United States and others makes it even more difficult for those considering taking a stand.”<sup>176</sup>

The United States also should leverage its security relationship with Saudi Arabia to address repressive state practices that threaten domestic and regional stability. It should urge Saudi authorities to focus the intelligence and security apparatuses of the MOI on those plotting violence or working in conjunction with internationally recognized extremist groups such as Al Qaeda and the Islamic State, rather than targeting individuals who peacefully criticize the state. In future cooperation with Saudi Minister of Interior, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Nayef, U.S. leaders should encourage his ministry to take concrete steps to end its human rights abuses, including the prosecution of peaceful human rights defenders under terrorism charges. Bin Nayef’s regular meetings with U.S. officials provide an opportunity to work on developing counter-terrorism strategies that align with the rule of law and respect for human rights.

U.S. engagement with Saudi Arabia on matters of domestic security should be complemented by the promotion of civil society in order to advance both stability and human rights. U.S. officials should urge Saudi officials to loosen both the restrictions on the licensing of civil society organizations and government controls over the ways in which civil society organizations are permitted to operate. Saudi Arabia’s 2015 Law of Associations preserves the Saudi Ministry of Social Affairs’ unchecked authority over registering associations and controlling their activities once licensed.<sup>177</sup> An open discussion between Saudi and U.S. officials working in development, with input from Saudi citizens, on how to amend the Law of Associations to facilitate civil society would be an excellent starting point.

Finally, when engaging with Saudi Arabia on civil society issues, U.S. leadership should recognize the opportunity presented by Deputy Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman’s economic reform program, Saudi Vision 2030. In seeking to diversify and modernize the Saudi economy, Saudi Vision 2030 requires a more engaged and active Saudi society. In addition to its economic blueprint, Saudi Vision 2030 includes proposals to expand communal activities, such as investing in public space and entertainment facilities, expanding access to education and promoting health and exercise. The United States should encourage the plan’s reforms and look for ways to encourage Saudi Arabia in implementing measures that will invigorate, diversify and expand the scope of civil society.

---

176 Adam Coogle, “The Deafening U.S. Silence on Saudi Rights,” Human Rights Watch, January 28, 2014, accessed December 21, 2016, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2014/01/28/deafening-us-silence-saudi-rights>.

177 Hala Al-Dosari, “New Saudi Law Maintains State Control Over Civil Society Organizations,” Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington, October 2016, , accessed December 20, 2016, <http://www.agsiw.org/new-saudi-law-maintains-state-control-over-civil-society-organizations/>.

## Recommendations for U.S. Policy:

---

- Apply high-level pressure for the release of Saudi prisoners of conscience, including members of the ACPRA, and urge Saudi authorities in private meetings and in public statements to halt the arrest and prosecution of peaceful activists and dissidents.
- U.S. embassy officials should regularly request to attend the trials of peaceful dissidents, including those held in the Specialized Criminal Court, and speak out publicly when trials fail to meet with international standards.
- Urge Saudi authorities to repeal or significantly amend the 2014 terrorism law and related legislation so that it cannot be used to prosecute individuals exercising universally recognized human rights.
- Condition future cooperation with Saudi intelligence and officials from the Ministry of Interior on Saudi progress in bringing the MOI's practices in line with international human rights standards and establishing and implementing internal review mechanism.
- Structure future US-Saudi counterterrorism assistance and cooperation so that programs for countering violent extremism include initiatives to increase civil society participation and protection.
- Encourage the government to reform the current Law of Associations to allow for greater registration of civil society organizations and permit associations to operate without undue government interference.
- Urge Saudi authorities to promulgate a written penal code.
- Encourage the King to build off the political reforms initiated under King Abdullah and offer insight and technical advice on how the Saudi government can administer its local and municipal elections to include greater participation.
- Utilize the opportunity of the kingdom's economic reform initiative, Saudi vision 2030, by helping Saudi Arabia harness the potential of its diverse population in both business and civil society.
- Hold Saudi Arabia accountable to its international commitments to human rights and the rule of law. Saudi Arabia is a signatory to several international human rights agreements. U.S. leadership should publicly highlight the discrepancy between Saudi rhetoric and actions in order to encourage the kingdom to follow through on its commitments.

## TIMELINE SOURCES

ALQST. “Abdulaziz al-Shubaili gets 8-year sentence: ACPRA update and background.” Accessed 27 October 2016. <https://alqst.org/eng/abdulaziz-al-shubaili-jailed-acpra-update-and-background/>.

Amnesty International. “Saudi Arabia’s ACPRA: How the Kingdom Silences Its Human Rights Activists.” October 2014. Accessed 20 December 2016. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde23/025/2014/en/>.

Amnesty International. “SAUDI ARABIA: HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVIST FACES FRESH TRIAL: MOHAMMED AL-BAJADI.” Accessed 17 November 2016. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/MDE23/032/2014/en/>.

Amnesty USA. “Good news! Saudi Arabia Mohammed Saleh al-Bajadi Released (UA 91/11).” Accessed 17 November 2016. <http://www.amnestyusa.org/our-work/latest-victories/good-news-saudi-arabia-mohammed-saleh-al-bajadi-released-ua-9111>.

ANHRI. “تحديث: المملكة العربية السعودية) – الحكم على فوزان الحربي بعشر سنوات سجن.” Accessed 24 October 2016. <http://anhri.net/?p=138242>.

ANHRI. “الحكم بسجن المدافع الحقوقي عبد العزيز الشيبلي، ٨ سنوات.” Accessed 24 October 2016. <http://anhri.net/?p=165295>.

Fisk, Robert. “Saudi Arabia Cannot Go on Throwing Every Decent Person Who Speaks out on Human Rights into Jail.” *The Independent*. 19 October 2016. Accessed 20 December 2016. <http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/saudi-arabia-human-rights-imprisonment-every-decent-man-who-speaks-out-in-jail-robert-fisk-a7369276.html>.

Human Rights Watch. “World Report 2012 Saudi Arabia.” Accessed 24 October 2016. <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2012/country-chapters/saudi-arabia>.

IFEX. “Persecution of founders of Saudi human rights watchdog ACPRA continues.” Accessed 24 October 2016. [http://www.ifex.org/saudi\\_arabia/2014/07/04/activist\\_sentenced\\_to\\_seven\\_years\\_in\\_prison/](http://www.ifex.org/saudi_arabia/2014/07/04/activist_sentenced_to_seven_years_in_prison/).

IFEX. “Saudi Arabian rights activists sentenced to prison,” Accessed 24 October 2016. [http://www.ifex.org/saudi\\_arabia/2013/03/13/activists\\_jailed/](http://www.ifex.org/saudi_arabia/2013/03/13/activists_jailed/).

“Saudi rights activists sentenced to years in prison: Amnesty.” *Reuters*. Accessed 24 October 2016, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-saudi-rights-idUSKCN0SE17920151020>.



