

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

February 24, 2021

The Honorable Antony Blinken
Secretary of State
2201 C St NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Mr. Secretary,

Congratulations on your recent confirmation as Secretary of State. We are eager to work with you and the State Department in pursuing a foreign policy that strengthens our partnerships overseas; promotes democracy, human rights, and security; and protects the rights of American citizens. In this spirit, we write to respectfully make three requests of the State Department:

- Press Saudi Arabia for the fair and transparent trial of U.S. citizens Mr. Salah Al-Haidar and Dr. Bader Al-Ibrahim.
- Advocate for the lifting of the travel bans and asset freezes against U.S. citizens and U.S. lawful permanent residents currently trapped in the Kingdom.
- Urge the release of and conduct a welfare check on Mr. Abdulrahman Al-Sadhan, a U.S. university graduate who has been detained for more than 1,000 days without charge and has not been in contact with his American family for nearly three years.

Mr. Salah Al-Haidar and Dr. Bader Al-Ibrahim are U.S. citizens — from Virginia and Colorado, respectively — facing criminal charges motivated by their peaceful advocacy for social reforms. These bogus charges are appalling, and their torture by the regime is unconscionable. While we are relieved that Saudi Arabia temporarily released Mr. Al-Haidar and Dr. Al-Ibrahim on February 4, we remain deeply concerned that they continue to face terrorism-related charges for peaceful dissent. Should Saudi Arabia continue to refuse to drop the charges against Mr. Al-Haidar and Dr. Al-Ibrahim, any proceedings involving them must be moved out of the Specialized Criminal Court — a secret court initially established to try terrorists, which is now increasingly used by the regime to issue hefty sentences against human rights activists — and instead be carried out in a transparent and fair manner. We also appreciate the U.S. Embassy's attendance at their trial in December 2020 and request that an embassy representative attend their next trial on March 8 and all subsequent hearings.

More broadly, we also ask that you condemn the use of travel bans and asset freezes by the Saudi regime for political purposes, including stifling dissent. Specifically, we request that you pressure the Saudi government to lift the travel bans on Dr. Walid Fitaihi and his seven family members, all U.S. citizens from Massachusetts, and Ms. Aziza Al-Yousef, a U.S. lawful permanent resident and Virginia resident. Saudi Arabia should also unfreeze Dr. Fitaihi's assets. These actions by the Kingdom have effectively trapped the Fitaihi family and Ms. Al-Yousef in Saudi Arabia.

Finally, we request that the U.S. embassy conduct a welfare check on Mr. Abdulrahman Al-Sadhan, a Saudi humanitarian aid worker and graduate of a California university who has been arbitrarily detained in Saudi Arabia for more than 1,000 days, and urge the Saudi government to release him. Mr. Al-Sadhan's family, who are U.S. citizens, have not heard from him for more than three years and are concerned about his well-being. To their knowledge, no charges have been filed against him and he has not been able to meet with a lawyer. Former prisoners have warned Mr. Al-Sadhan's family that he has been tortured in custody.

The reports of egregious violations of human rights in Saudi Arabia are growing. It is clear that after facing no consequences for the gruesome assassination of Virginia resident Jamal Khashoggi in 2018, the regime continues to act with impunity. The recent release of women's rights activist Loujain Al-Hathloul followed her wrongful conviction and unjust three-year detention and does not constitute meaningful reform, especially as she also remains under an unjustified travel ban. We cannot tolerate Saudi Arabia's campaign against those who bravely speak out for human rights and basic freedoms, especially if those individuals are U.S. citizens and lawful residents. It is our duty to protect the safety and security of all Americans and ensure that U.S. foreign policy reflects American values like the promotion of human rights. We urge you to make clear that Saudi Arabia will be held accountable for these ongoing human rights violations that continue to degrade the U.S.-Saudi relationship.

Thank you for your immediate attention to these urgent human rights cases of our constituents.

Sincerely,



Gerald E. Connolly
United States Representative



Tim Kaine
United States Senator



Michael F. Bennet
United States Senator



Dianne Feinstein
United States Senator



John Hickenlooper
United States Senator



Edward J. Markey
United States Senator



Mark R. Warner
United States Senator



Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator