

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 19, 2019

King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud
Royal Court
Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

Dear King Salman:

We have long been concerned about systematic human rights abuses in Saudi Arabia and are particularly troubled by the hardline nature of the more recent crackdown on dissidents, human rights activists, and journalists, including the gruesome murder of *Washington Post* journalist Jamal Khashoggi. While we continue to call for a full accounting on the murder of Mr. Khashoggi by Saudi authorities, we also request the immediate and unconditional release of a number of prisoners held by your government, many of them on dubious charges related to their activism. These include writer Raif Badawi, human rights lawyer Waleed Abu al-Khair, and women's rights activists Loujain al-Hathloul and Samar Badawi, among many others. Saudi Arabia has also held American citizen Dr. Walid Fitaihi since November 2017 without charges and reportedly tortured him.

For too long, human rights have taken a back seat in Saudi Arabia. Not only have reputable international organizations detailed the arbitrary detention of peaceful activists and dissidents without trial for long periods, but the systematic discrimination against women, religious minorities, and mistreatment of migrant workers and others has also been well-documented. We have also been troubled by the regular use of the Specialized Criminal Court and counterterrorism law to target peaceful activists and human rights defenders, as well as reports of flawed investigations, coerced confessions, and the use of torture.

While we were heartened by limited domestic reform efforts in recent years, for example under the Saudi Vision 2030 plan first announced by Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman in 2016, any positive steps forward have been deeply undermined by the increased arrests of activists and independent journalists, the over reliance on the death penalty, the murder of Mr. Khashoggi, and even the troubling Saudi-led intervention in Yemen. It's clear the status quo cannot continue: significant reforms in Saudi Arabia are critical now more than ever.

Accordingly, releasing political prisoners in Saudi Arabia would help demonstrate belated yet welcome respect for human rights and help repair the damaged U.S.-Saudi relationship. Specifically, we urge you in your role as King of Saudi Arabia to pardon Raif Badawi and Waleed Abu al-Khair. In addition, we urge the unconditional release of detained women's rights activists Samar Badawi, Loujain al-Hathloul, Eman al-Nafjan, Aziza al-Yousef, Nouf Abdelaziz, Mayaa al-Zahrani, Nassima al-Saada, Hatoon al-Fassi, Shadan al-Onezi, and Amal al-Harbi, some of whom were reportedly tortured during detention, and a supporter of the women's movement Mohammed al-Rabea.

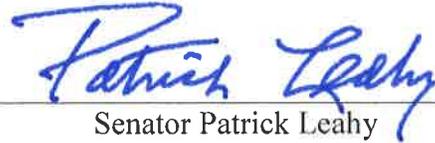
Lastly, we urge the immediate and unconditional release of American citizen Walid Fitaihi, a Harvard-trained physician who has been imprisoned without any public charges or trial since November 2017, allegedly as part of a larger crackdown on corruption. Troublingly, reports of Dr. Fitaihi being tortured have also been documented. We will not tolerate this treatment of an American citizen and implore you to act swiftly to resolve the case of Dr. Fitaihi.

The brutality of the Khashoggi killing and Saudi-led intervention in Yemen, as well as the continued detention of political prisoners threaten not only Saudi Arabia's regional role but also the future of the U.S.-Saudi relationship. We will continue to closely watch Saudi action—or inaction—on human rights as Congress considers measures related to the Middle East. Our shared interests must be underscored by support for basic values and freedoms, as anything else will not be sustainable.

Sincerely,



Senator Richard J. Durbin



Senator Patrick Leahy



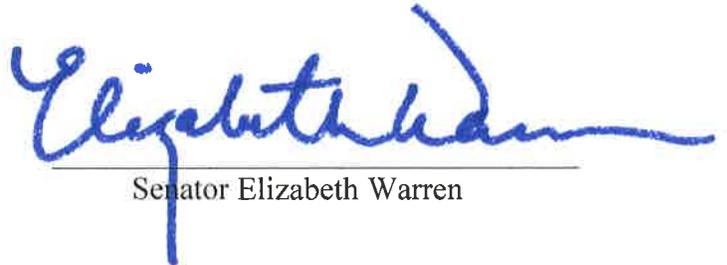
Senator Dianne Feinstein



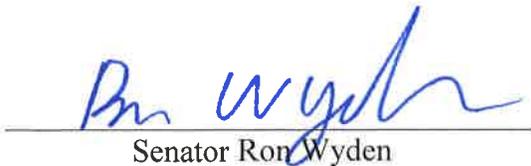
Senator Kirsten Gillibrand



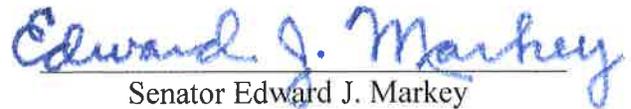
Senator Richard Blumenthal



Senator Elizabeth Warren



Senator Ron Wyden



Senator Edward J. Markey



Senator Jeanne Shaheen