

SAUDI ARABIA 2021 HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is a monarchy ruled by King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, who is both head of state and head of government. The 1992 Basic Law sets out the system of governance, rights of citizens, and powers and duties of the government, and it provides that the Quran and Sunna (the traditions of the Prophet Muhammad) serve as the country's constitution. It specifies that the rulers of the country shall be male descendants of the founder, King Abdulaziz (Ibn Saud).

The State Security Presidency, National Guard, and Ministries of Defense and Interior, all of which report to the king, are responsible for law enforcement and maintenance of order. The State Security Presidency includes the General Directorate of Investigation (mabahith), Special Security Forces, and Special Emergency Forces; police are under the Ministry of Interior. Civilian authorities generally maintained effective control over the security forces. There were credible reports that members of the security forces committed some abuses.

Significant human rights issues included credible reports of: executions for nonviolent offenses; forced disappearances; torture and cases of cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment of prisoners and detainees by government agents; harsh and life-threatening prison conditions; arbitrary arrest and detention; political prisoners or detainees; harassment and intimidation against Saudi dissidents living abroad; arbitrary or unlawful interference with privacy; collective punishment of family members for offenses allegedly committed by an individual; serious abuses in a conflict, including civilian casualties and damage to civilian infrastructure as a result of airstrikes in Yemen; serious restrictions on free expression and media, including unjustified arrests or prosecutions against journalists and others, and censorship; serious restrictions on internet freedom; substantial interference with the freedom of peaceful assembly and freedom of association, including overly restrictive laws on the organization, funding, or operation of nongovernmental organizations and civil society organizations; severe restrictions of religious freedom; restrictions on freedom of movement; inability of citizens to choose their government peacefully through free and fair elections; serious and unreasonable

and verbal and physical abuse. During the year several dozen (primarily) female domestic workers sought shelter at their embassies' safehouses to escape physical and sexual abuse by their employers. Those workers usually sought legal assistance from their embassies and government agencies to obtain end-of-service benefits and exit visas. In addition to their embassies, some domestic servants could contact the NSHR, HRC, Interministerial General Secretariat to Combat Human Trafficking, and Migrant Workers' Welfare Department, which provided services to safeguard migrant workers' rights and protect them from abuse. Some were able to apply to the offices of regional governors and lodge an appeal with the Board of Grievances against decisions by those authorities.

Occupational safety and health regulations do not cover farmers, herdsmen, domestic servants, or workers in family-operated businesses. Although the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development employed nearly 1,000 labor inspectors, foreign workers privately reported frequent failures to enforce health and safety standards. Although statistics were unavailable, examples of major industrial accidents during the year that caused the death or serious injury to workers included local media reports from February 15 that at least six Bangladeshi migrant workers were killed in a fire at a furniture factory in Medina.