

Lawyers' Rights Watch Canada

NGO in Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations
Promoting human rights by protecting those who defend them

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July 29, 2016

The Honourable Stéphane Dion
Minister of Foreign Affairs
125 Sussex Drive, Ottawa, ON K1A 0G2
Email: stephane.dion@parl.gc.ca

Dear Minister Dion;

Re: Release of Waleed Abu al-Khair and Raif Badawi from arbitrary detention in Saudi Arabia

Lawyers' Rights Watch Canada (LRWC) is writing to request a reply to our 27 June 2016 letter and to repeat the request made by that letter—that you use your influence to ensure that Saudi Arabia immediately and unconditionally release Waleed Abu al-Khair and Raif Badawi from prison. LRWC would like to know what actions your office is taking to ensure compliance by Saudi Arabia with its international law duties in respect to these cases.

Recent reports indicate that Saudi Arabia is taking extraordinary measure to suppress reports of its grave violations of international human rights and humanitarian law. In response to threats by Saudi Arabia to withdraw UN funding, the 20 April 2016 UN Secretary-General's Annual Report on Children and Armed Conflict was amended (on 24 June 2016) to remove a reference identifying the Saudi Arabia-led military coalition in Yemen as a party that kills and maims children and engages in attacks on schools and/or hospitals. Alarming, an Ottawa newspaper (The Hills Times on 27 July 2016) gave Saudi Arabia a platform to advertise false claims that "[Canada and Saudi Arabia] share the same values", and that Saudi Arabia is recognized as "complying with a high standard of human rights regulation". Saudi Arabia's ambassador to Canada was further quoted as saying that he "always listen[s] to [Stéphane Dion]" and "really admire[s] him". LRWC is now concerned that Saudi Arabia has exerted behind-the-scenes influence to prevent UN bodies from considering or acting on complaints about the wrongful convictions and arbitrary imprisonment of Waleed Abu al-Khair and Raif Badawi.

These developments raise the concern that Saudi Arabia may directly or indirectly, caution or persuade you or your office to forbear from any communications that acknowledge human rights abuses by Saudi Arabia including in the cases of Waleed Abu al-Khair and Raif Badawi or otherwise.

Whether or not this has occurred, LRWC again requests you to use your reportedly good relationship with Saudi Arabia to call for the immediate and unconditional release of Waleed Abu al-Khair and Raif Badawi in compliance with international human rights law.

We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Gail Davidson, Executive Director, LRWC



Maya Duvage, LRWC member

Copied to:

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