

Leaders of Muslim countries urged to denounce persecution of women's rights defenders

Leading Muslim women's rights activists raise serious concerns about the crackdown on women's rights defenders, including repression, imprisonment and torture.

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Motivated by grave concerns over the continuing crackdown on women's rights activists in some countries, 118 leading women's rights activists, scholars and organizations working in Muslim contexts have come together to co-sign a letter that was sent on Wednesday to 45 leaders of Muslim-majority countries, calling on them to raise their voices in support of equality for women, to condemn the torture of women human rights defenders, and to request the immediate and unconditional release of those detained in Saudi Arabia and Iran.

**== MAKE EQUALITY ==
A REALITY FOR ALL
== MUSLIM WOMEN ==**

Make Equality a Reality for All Muslim Women

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We urge you, as leaders of Muslim countries, to stand in unity against the persecution of women who raise their voices for equality.”

Letter to leaders

The letter is being spearheaded by international women's rights organizations [Musawah](#) and [Equality Now](#).

Of particular alarm is the imprisonment in Saudi Arabia of numerous women's rights activists, who have been accused by the Saudi government of "coordinated activities to undermine the security, stability and natural unity of the kingdom." Sources from the Saudi royal court in Riyadh say the women could face up to 20 years in prison or even be sentenced to death.

Eleven detained women, including leading women's rights activists Loujain al-Hathloul, Aziza al-Yousef, Eman al-Nafjan and Hatoon Al-Fassi, appeared at a criminal court on Wednesday in Riyadh.

Western diplomats and journalists were denied entry to the hearing, but according to media reports, sources close to the case say the defendants informed the three-judge panel about mistreatment by authorities they had experienced since they were arrested in May 2018.

Serious allegations include prolonged solitary confinement, electric shocks, flogging, and sexual assault.

The day after the hearing, Saudi authorities temporarily released Aziza al-Yousef, Eman al-Nafjan and Ruqayyaa al-Mhareb. Whilst this is a welcome step, it is important to highlight that

defending women's rights is not a crime and these women should never have been imprisoned in the first place.

In addition to Loujain al-Hathloul, who is yet to be released, other prominent women's rights activists who remain in prison in Saudi Arabia awaiting trial are Nouf Abdelaziz, Samar Badawi, Nassima Al-Sadah, Amal Al-Harbi, and Shadan Al-Anezi.

Calls continue for the immediate, unconditional release of the remaining arrested activists, with all charges against them dropped, and for Saudi authorities to ensure an impartial and independent investigation into allegations of torture.

The signatories are also extremely troubled by the egregious treatment of women's rights activists in Iran, such as internationally renowned lawyer Nasrin Sotoudeh, who has reportedly been sentenced to 38 years in prison and 148 lashes, and Narges Mohammadi, sentenced in 2016 to 16 years in prison.

"We urge you, as leaders of Muslim countries, to recognize the message of equality that is inherent in Islam and that is guaranteed in many of our constitutions, and acknowledge the role of gender equality in bringing about peace and security. We need your political will and leadership to make equality a reality for Muslim women and all women who live in Muslim contexts so that they can contribute fully and freely to the development of their societies."

- Letter from 118 Muslim women activists, scholars, and advocates for justice

"It is high time Muslim leaders speak out about equality and justice being Islamic values, support women's rights groups in their countries, and take action to end laws, policies, and practices made in the name of Islam that continue to discriminate against women until today. If Muslim countries had been true to the teachings of Islam that granted women rights considered revolutionary 1,400 years ago, the Muslim world today would be at the forefront of the women's movement, instead of at the bottom of all gender equality surveys."

- Zainah Anwar, Executive Director, Musawah

"It is disheartening to see how low down the rank Muslim countries come in the UN's global

نكتب اليكم اليوم 118 كاتبات نساء بحماسة حقوق النساء والامانة وكتمناه ونشيطات من العالم الإسلامي، فيما يماورنا القتل اراء ما تعرض له الناشطات في بعض الدول. وباعتباركم قادة الدول الإسلامية، فإننا نطلب من حركتكم رفع صوتكم علنا لدعم قضايا المساواة للنساء والاعتراف بالبور الحاسم التي تلعبه الناشطات المدافعات عن حقوق النساء وادانة سجن وتعذيب المدافعات عن حقوق الانسان.

يعمل فوج واظهار منظمات المجتمع المدني والناشطات، بما في ذلك المتعلق بالتمويل، اتخاذاً مقلداً في العديد من البلدان، وعلى وجه الخصوص، نحن بالقلق ازاء معاملة الناشطات الريفيات في مجال حقوق المرأة، بما في ذلك تدمير سوتوده، وهي محامية ونشطة مشهورة دولياً، ونحسب ما ذكر، فقد علمك عليها

مؤخراً بالسجن لمدة 38 عامًا و 148 جلدة و 16 عامًا في عام 2016

والاعمال، تعرض بالقتل اراء عمليات الاعمال والاحجاز الصحفي الناشطات الصحفيات هاتون القاسي ولو حين الهذول وازمان الفجان ووزارة اليوسف ونوف عبد العزيز ونسبية السادة، وسعر بدوي، وامل الحربي، وثمان العنن الثواني يداختر من هولاء الناشطات باهن بكتان تهديدا للامن القومي، الا ان ذلك مغاير الحقيقة، التي نقيد بان مستوى المساواة ما بين الجنسين في بلد ما يرتبط ارتباطا وثيقا بمستوى الامن والسلام

نحن النشطاء والقضاء والمدافعين

musawah
Equality Now
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Arabic letter urging country leaders stand against persecution of women's rights defenders



Photo: Chedley Ben Ibrahim/ Equality Now

Gender Inequality Index. The arrests, imprisonment and alleged torture of women's rights activists in Iran and Saudi Arabia should be condemned by all Muslim States. We cannot achieve peace, prosperity, and progress without committing to equality for women and girls, and taking active steps to make this a reality."

- Yasmeen Hassan, Global Director, Equality Now

[Read the full letter with signatures](#), in English or Arabic, and sign to send letters to leaders in your own names.

ABOUT MUSAWAH:

Musawah ('equality' in Arabic) is a global movement for equality and justice in the Muslim family. We are comprised of NGOs, activists, scholars, legal practitioners, policy makers, and grassroots women and men from around the world. Musawah believes equality and justice in the Muslim family are necessary and possible. We work for the advancement of human rights for women in Muslim contexts, in both their public and private lives. For more information, go to www.musawah.org.

ABOUT EQUALITY NOW:

Equality Now is an international human rights organization that works to protect and promote the rights of women and girls around the world by combining grassroots activism with international, regional and national legal advocacy. Our international network of lawyers, activists, and supporters achieve legal and systemic change by holding governments responsible for enacting and enforcing laws and policies that end legal inequality, sex trafficking, sexual violence, and harmful practices such as child marriage and female genital mutilation. For more information, go to www.equalitynow.org.

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