

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

August 14, 2018

The Honorable Mike Pompeo  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of State  
2201 C St NW  
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Pompeo,

We join with those deeply concerned by Saudi Arabia's continuing arrests and arbitrary detentions of at least a dozen women's rights activists. As recently as August 1, Saudi authorities arrested Samar Badawi and Nassima al-Sadah, broadening the campaign to stifle the voices of human rights advocates. A State Department official alluded to these detentions in response to Saudi Arabia's recent retaliation against Canada, stating that "[the State Department has] asked the Government of Saudi Arabia for additional information on the detention of several activists" and "...encourage[s] the Government of Saudi Arabia to respect due process and to publicize information on the status of legal cases." We urge you to make a stronger public statement in support of detained human rights activists, to call for the release of these individuals in your discussions with Saudi authorities, and to prioritize human rights among the many urgent issues in the bilateral relationship.

These arrests are starkly at odds with Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman's stated commitments to bringing Saudi Arabia into the 21st century and Vision 2030's support for equal opportunity for all. In a March 19 interview with 60 Minutes, bin Salman said: "Saudi women still have not received their full rights. There are rights stipulated in Islam that they still don't have. We have come a very long way and have a short way to go." Yet since May 15, Saudi authorities have arrested multiple prominent women's rights advocates and imposed travel bans on numerous others, many of them longtime supporters of ending the ban on women driving and abolishing the male guardianship system. If convicted, they could face up to 20 years in prison.

Among those who have been arrested are Loujain al-Hathloul, Eman al-Nafjan, and Aziza al-Yousef, longtime proponents of overturning the driving ban. For over two months now, they have been detained without charge in an unknown location and with limited access to family members and lawyers. Authorities have also imprisoned Hatoon al-Fassi, a renowned scholar and associate professor of women's history at King Saud University and one of the first women to acquire a Saudi driver's license.

While we welcome Saudi Arabia's lifting of the driving ban for women, serious impediments to women's freedoms in the country remain. The male guardianship system, which requires women to attain the permission of their male guardian for a vast array of decisions, including applying for a passport, international travel, getting married or even leaving prison, leaves women with little ability to seek assistance for their own welfare. As such, incidents of gender-based violence and forced marriages are dramatically underreported.

Promoting human rights and democracy has long been a bedrock of U.S. foreign policy, including advancing the rights and empowerment of women and girls. As such, we urge you to press Saudi Arabia to release these activists, strongly affirm the United States' commitment to gender equality and emphasize the need for Saudi Arabia to cease its ongoing repression of human rights defenders. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



LOIS FRANKEL  
Member of Congress



ILEANA ROS-LEHTINEN  
Member of Congress



TED DEUTCH  
Member of Congress



BRAD SHERMAN  
Member of Congress



GREGORY W. MEEKS  
Member of Congress



ALBIO SIRES  
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WILLIAM R. KEATING  
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DAVID N. CICILLINE  
Member of Congress



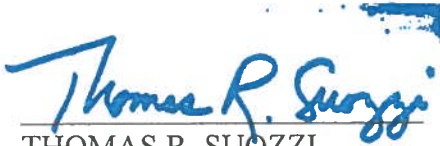
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JOAQUIN CASTRO  
Member of Congress



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DINA TITUS  
Member of Congress



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THOMAS R. SUOZZI  
Member of Congress



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TED W. LIEU  
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ADRIANO ESPAILLAT  
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RANDY HULTGREN  
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