

Federica Mogherini

EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy
Vice President of the European Commission
European Commission
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1049 Brussels

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**



European Institutions Office

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Dear High Representative Mogherini,

URGENT: FOREIGN AFFAIRS COUNCIL DISCUSSION ON SAUDI ARABIA

Amnesty International is writing to ask that Saudi Arabia be placed as an urgent item on the forthcoming Foreign Affairs Council (FAC) agenda; and for strong FAC conclusions on human rights in Saudi Arabia to be adopted ahead of the next European Union (EU) - Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) ministerial meeting.

You will already be aware of blogger and prisoner of conscience Raif Badawi, who was sentenced to ten years in prison and 1000 lashes, the first 50 of which were administered to him in public on 9 January. Whilst we welcomed your spokesperson's statement, and the reference to further action taken, there has still been no public call for his release, nor that of his lawyer Waleed Abu al-Khair. As a matter of urgency, the EU and member states must call for the immediate and unconditional release of Raif Badawi and all other prisoners of conscience in Saudi Arabia. The forthcoming FAC should agree on follow-up action at EU and member state level.

Raif Badawi's conviction and treatment is symbolic of the relentless crackdown on freedom of expression in Saudi Arabia, where we have also reported a surge in executions, widespread use of corporal punishment, continued discrimination against women in law and practice, and the widespread use of repressive 'anti-terror' laws. Despite the commitment made in the EU's Strategic Framework on Human Rights to 'place human rights at the centre of its relations with all third countries' and to promote human rights in external action 'without exception', it is very rare for the EU to openly condemn human rights violations in Saudi Arabia. EU policy is instead too often defined by the differing approaches and interests pursued by individual member states. Given the gravity of the human rights situation, there can be no continuation of 'business as usual' following the accession of Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud. It is time for an urgent discussion amongst EU foreign ministers, with clear human rights calls to the new King outlined in FAC conclusions, and an agreement on how the EU will defend the universality of human rights in all future relations with Saudi Arabia, including bilateral relations, EU-GCC relations, and any counter-terrorism cooperation.

We look forward to your reply and stand ready to provide any further information you may require.

Yours sincerely,

Ivana McGowan
Director of Programmes
Acting Director