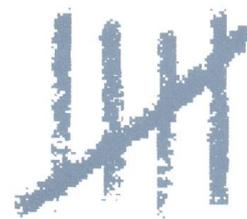


Rt Hon Philip Hammond MP
Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs
Foreign & Commonwealth Office
King Charles Street
London
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BAR HUMAN RIGHTS
COMMITTEE OF
ENGLAND AND WALES

London, 19 January 2015

Open letter RE: Mr Raif Badawi sentenced to 1,000 lashes in Saudi Arabia

Dear Foreign Secretary,

The Bar Human Rights Committee (BHRC) is extremely concerned about the ongoing torture and imprisonment of the Saudi Arabian blogger Mr Raif Badawi. As you will no doubt be aware, on 7th May 2014 Mr Badawi was sentenced at the Criminal Court in Jeddah, with an increase on appeal, to 10 years in prison and 1,000 lashes, followed by a 10-year travel ban, a ban on using media outlets, and a fine of one million Saudi Arabian riyals. Mr Badawi received this sentence pursuant to charges that he insulted Islam on a liberal online forum he had created.

On Friday 9th January 2015, Mr Badawi received the first round of fifty lashes in a public flogging after Friday prayers, outside the Juffali Mosque in Jeddah. He is to be subjected to the same procedure on a further nineteen occasions. According to the final court decision, he will be receiving no more than 50 lashes per session, with a break of no less than a week between sessions. We deplore the fact that Mr Badawi has been subjected to this treatment and will be subjected to further floggings, in flagrant violation of the UN Convention against Torture and Other Cruel Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, which Saudi Arabia ratified in September 1997.

The United Nations Committee against Torture, in its 2002 comments on Saudi Arabia's first and only report to the committee, criticised,

"[t]he sentencing to, and imposition of, corporal punishments by judicial and administrative authorities, including, in particular, flogging and amputation of limbs, that are not in conformity with the Convention."

Furthermore, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Zeid Raad al-Hussein, confirmed in a statement on 15th January 2014 in response to Mr Badawi's treatment that flogging is "at the very least, a form of cruel and inhuman punishment" prohibited under international human rights law.

We are therefore profoundly disappointed that despite this criticism, the Saudi Arabian authorities continue to violate international human rights law in this way.

The BHRC strongly urges the British Government to call to account the abhorrent and inhuman treatment of Mr Badawi, with a view to securing his release without fear of further arrest or torture. Further, we request that the British Government call for the immediate quashing of the conviction and sentence imposed on Mr Badawi, with particular emphasis on preventing any further public flogging.

We are aware that the Saudi Arabian authorities have consistently disregarded international human rights law, extensively persecuting civil society activists and human rights defenders with complete and utter impunity. In addition to current torture being meted out in the above case, on 6th July 2014 Mr Badawi's lawyer, prominent human rights defender Waleed Abu al-Khair, was sentenced by the Specialised Criminal Court to 15 years in prison to be followed by a 15-year travel ban. He was found guilty of

“disobeying the ruler and seeking to remove his legitimacy”, “insulting the judiciary and questioning the integrity of judges”, “setting up an unlicensed organization”, “harming the reputation of the state by communicating with international organizations” and “preparing, storing and sending information that harms public order”.

The actions of the Saudi Arabian authorities are in direct contravention of international human rights law and are causing a devastating impact upon the freedoms and lives of Saudi Arabian citizens.

Given the strong trade relations that the UK has formed in recent years with the Saudi Arabian Government, it is imperative that the British Government not only publicly condemns the treatment of Mr Badawi, but that it directly intervenes through personable representations on his behalf. To do otherwise would question the UK's commitment to upholding the rule of law and protecting individual human rights.

We thank you for your assistance in this matter and continue to offer our support and assistance in the implementation of international human rights law.

Yours sincerely,



Kirsty Brimelow QC

Chair, Bar Human Rights Committee of England and Wales (BHRC)

The Bar Human Rights Committee of England and Wales (BHRC) is the international human rights arm of the Bar of England and Wales. It is independent of the Bar Council and works to protect the rights of advocates, judges and human rights defenders around the world. The Committee is concerned with defending the rule of law and internationally recognised legal standards relating to human rights and the right to a fair trial. The remit of BHRC extends to all countries of the world, apart from its own jurisdiction of England & Wales. This reflects the Committee's need to maintain its role as an independent but legally qualified observer, critic and advisor, with internationally accepted rule of law principles at the heart of its agenda.