

Continuing incarceration of women's rights activists in Saudi Arabia, 'reprehensible': UN experts

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The detained have been charged for being involved in pro-democracy demonstrations, and previously campaigning for the right of women to vote and drive. In late June, a long-standing ban on women driving in Saudi Arabia, was lifted by royal decree.

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– *UN Experts on Human Rights*

The group of nine independent experts – UN Special Rapporteurs and working group members – said they condemned the actions of the Saudi authorities in continuing to detain the women rights defenders, “in the strongest possible terms,” calling for their “immediate and unconditional” release.

A group of those indicted – Samar Badawi, Nassima Al-Sadah, Nouf Abdulaziz, Mayya Al-Zahrani, and Hatoon Al-Fassi – are being held in detention, without any channels of communication. The five were particularly active in demonstrations for women's rights.

In Friday's statement, the experts urged Saudi authorities “to immediately make the whereabouts of these five human rights defenders known and to grant them access to their families and lawyers.”

The group of women also include Israa Al-Ghomghan, who faces possible execution despite being denied representation during her trial, and is being tried in Riyadh's Specialized Criminal Court, an entity set up for terrorism-related cases.

“It is reprehensible that Ms. Al-Ghomagham is facing the death penalty for asserting her fundamental right to peaceful assembly,” the UN experts stressed.

They added that women rights defenders are subject to particular risks and

vulnerable to widespread gender-based discrimination, signaling the Saudi administration's duty to its people.

"We wish to remind the Saudi Government of its obligation to protect and promote the rights of all human rights defenders as they peacefully carry out their legitimate work," said the experts.