



The Honourable Stéphane Dion  
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The Honourable Omar Alghabra  
Parliamentary Secretary for Foreign Affairs  
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May 20, 2016

Dear Minister Dion and Parliamentary Secretary Alghabra,

We are writing this Open Letter to you in advance of your visit to Saudi Arabia next week, during which it is reported you will meet with Saudi officials and attend a meeting of the Gulf Cooperation Council. We urge that you use all possible opportunities and exchanges during your visit to raise grave human rights concerns related to both Saudi Arabia and Yemen. In particular we call on you as a matter of priority to press Saudi authorities to:

- immediately and unconditionally release all prisoners of conscience including **Raif Badawi** and **Waleed Abu al-Khair**; and
- cease the war crimes and other human rights violations that have been and continue to be committed by the Saudi-led coalition that has intervened in **Yemen**, including ending the use of cluster munitions and assisting in efforts to clear unexploded cluster munitions already used.

You travel to Saudi Arabia at a time when the country's longstanding troubling human rights record has deteriorated significantly, both domestically and in connection with the intervention in Yemen. At the same time there is an unprecedented level of concern among Canadians about the range and severity of those human rights violations. That awareness has been amplified because of Canadian connections to Saudi human rights concerns, notably the case of Raif Badawi whose family resides in Canada and the deal that has been reached by London, Ontario-based General Dynamics and authorized by the federal government for the sale of \$15 billion worth of Canadian-manufactured Light Armoured Vehicles to Saudi security forces. Amnesty International has called for the unconditional release of Raif Badawi and for the arms deal to be suspended due to human rights concerns. In this context there is considerable anticipation and expectation that human rights must and will top your agenda in Saudi Arabia.

#### Raif Badawi and Waleed Abu al-Khair

Minister Dion and Parliamentary Secretary Alghabra, as you know Raif Badawi is in prison simply because he blogs. His lawyer, Waleed Abu al-Khair, is in prison because he defends human rights. Their two cases are illustrative of the human rights crackdown that has deepened in Saudi Arabia in recent years. Both men should be freed.

Mr. Badawi has been sentenced to a 10 year prison term and is to be lashed 1000 times. He was subjected to a first round of 50 lashes in January 2015. The remaining 950 lashes have been suspended since that time, due very likely to international pressure. Mr. Abu al-Khair has been sentenced to 15 years in prison, because of his efforts to defend individuals like Mr. Badawi in the Saudi justice system. He was charged and convicted of wholly unfounded terrorism-related offences under a wide-ranging new anti-terrorism law that was adopted in 2014 and contravenes numerous international human rights obligations.

Minister Dion, we have very much welcomed the statements you have made publically and privately on a number of occasions indicating that you are deeply committed to securing the release of Mr. Badawi, so that he can join his wife and young children in Canada. This visit provides you with an invaluable opportunity to make that request directly and personally with Saudi counterparts, highlighting that Mr. Badawi's freedom would be welcomed by Canadians across the country and that Mr. Abu al-Khair must also be released.

### Yemen

The civil war in Yemen is by any measure one of the gravest human rights and humanitarian crises in the world today. It is also one of the most overlooked and ignored. Thousands of civilians have been killed. At least 2.5 million people have been displaced and over 80% of the population is in dire need of humanitarian aid. Amnesty International reports, based on several on the ground research missions, have documented human rights violations and abuses by all parties to the conflict.

Saudi Arabia first intervened in the civil war in neighbouring Yemen by launching air strikes against the Huthi armed group in March 2015. Military attacks by Saudi-led coalition forces have continued since that time. The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and many other monitoring groups and human rights experts have documented extensive civilian casualties that have resulted from Saudi-coalition attacks, which almost certainly constitute war crimes. Concerns include attacks that appear to have deliberately targeted civilians and civilian objects such as hospitals, schools, markets and mosques. Saudi-coalition forces have also used cluster munitions, which are banned under international law.

Minister Dion and Parliamentary Secretary Alghabra, Canadian humanitarian organizations are on the ground in Yemen providing emergency relief to the millions of civilians who are bearing the brunt of this conflict, including the impact of Saudi-coalition attacks. It is particularly necessary and appropriate, therefore, for you to insist that Saudi forces in Yemen fully comply with international humanitarian law in the planning and execution of all military operations. They must ensure that civilians and civilian objects are not targeted, take necessary precautions to distinguish between civilians and fighters and between civilian objects and military objectives and end indiscriminate and disproportionate attacks.

Amnesty International researchers have once again documented extensive use of cluster munitions by the Saudi-led coalition. We will be releasing those findings publicly on May 23<sup>rd</sup>. We note the devastating impact of cluster munitions in particular on children and returning internally displaced persons. Our research points to nine children who have been killed through cluster munition injury. We urge you to join Amnesty International in pressing Saudi authorities to stop using cluster munitions, facilitate clearance of areas contaminated by unexploded ordnance and immediately provide the UN with precise locations and details of cluster munition attacks.

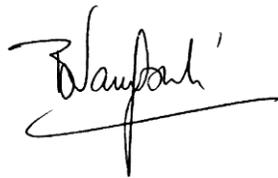
In addition to the cases of Raif Badawi, Waleed Abu al-Khair and the situation in Yemen, there are of course numerous other very serious human rights concerns in Saudi Arabia, including entrenched discrimination against women, increasing use of the death penalty, prevalence of torture and ill-treatment, anti-terrorism laws that contravene international standards, arrests and imprisonment of human rights defenders, religious leaders and government critics, restrictions on free expression, repression of political dissent, unfair trials and abuses against migrant workers. We urge you to use all opportunities to press your Saudi counterparts for human rights improvements across this range of concerns.

Saudi Arabia's human rights record has worsened over the past year and public pressure, in Canada and globally, for action to address those concerns grows. Your visit provides a tremendous opportunity to press Saudi authorities to take those steps and demonstrate progress, in particular by releasing Raif Badawi and Waleed Abu al-Khair and ending war crimes and other human rights violations in Yemen.

Sincerely,



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