

## **Oral statement on the Universal Periodic Review Report on Saudi Arabia**

In the report on the Delegation is quoted with the claim that *«the laws of Saudi Arabia guaranteed freedom of opinion and expression to everyone without discrimination.»* The delegation further stated that *«[t]he principle of statutory limitations on freedom of expression had been adopted, in line with the relevant international standards, to ensure that the application of that right did not have an adverse impact.»* And according to a further claim on freedom of religious practice and religious tolerance, *«the values of tolerance, coexistence, moderation and righteousness prevailed in Saudi society.»*

We of course all know that this is far from true. Raif Badawi has been in custody since 2012, merely for blogging about humanist ideas and for the statement that he regarded all religions equal. His lawyer Waleed Albukhair was arrested in 2014 and has been behind bars ever since, for defending humanists like Raif Badawi and for setting up the «Monitor of Human Rights in Saudi Arabia».

Instead of releasing these two individuals, who aspired nothing more than to express their thoughts freely and to exchange ideas with other members of the Saudi society, the Saudi regime continues to imprison human rights activists, most recently also numerous women lobbying for equal rights.

Representatives of Saudi Arabia: Release Raif Badawi and the other peaceful political prisoners immediately. We all would like to welcome you as a worthy member of this Council. But for that you need to suit the action to your words.

Andreas Kyriacou, Center For Inquiry