

Saudi Arabia: Women's Rights Activists Charged



(Beirut) – Saudi Arabia's public prosecution agency announced on March 1, 2019 that the country's leading women's rights activists who have been detained following arrests that began in May 2018 would face charges and be put on trial, Human Rights Watch said today. The prosecutors did not specify the charges.

Human rights organizations began reporting in November that Saudi interrogators tortured at least four of the women, including with electric shocks and whippings, and had sexually harassed and assaulted them.

"The Saudi prosecution is bringing charges against the women's rights activists instead of releasing them unconditionally," said Michael Page, deputy Middle East director at Human Rights Watch. "The Saudi authorities have done nothing to investigate serious allegations of torture, and now, it's the women's rights activists, not any torturers, who face criminal charges and trials."

On March 1, Saudi public prosecution issued a statement

referring to people arrested for undertaking “coordinated and organized activities... that aim to undermine the Kingdom’s security, stability, and national unity” who will face charges and the prosecution is in the process of referring them for trial. There was no mention of any investigation into the torture allegations.

The crackdown on women’s rights activists began just weeks ahead of the much-anticipated lifting of the driving ban on women on June 24, a cause for which many of the detained activists had campaigned. While some were quickly released, others remain detained without charge. They include Loujain al-Hathloul, Aziza al-Yousef, Eman al-Nafjan, Nouf Abdelaziz, Mayaa al-Zahrani, Samar Badawi, Nassima al-Saada, Hatoun al-Fassi, Shadan al-Onezi, and Amal al-Harbi, all women’s rights activists, as well as male supporters of the movement, including Mohammed Rabea, a social activist. On February 26, Jared Kushner, United States President Donald Trump’s son-in-law and adviser, met with the Saudi king and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman in Saudi Arabia.