

5-2018

Saudi Arabia Must be Held to Account for Human Rights Violations in Yemen

Human Rights Clinic
Columbia Law School

Mwatana Organization for Human Rights

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarship.law.columbia.edu/human_rights_institute



Part of the [Human Rights Law Commons](#), and the [International Humanitarian Law Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Human Rights Clinic & Mwatana Organization for Human Rights, *Saudi Arabia Must be Held to Account for Human Rights Violations in Yemen*, (2018).

Available at: https://scholarship.law.columbia.edu/human_rights_institute/67

This Document is brought to you for free and open access by the Research Centers & Programs at Scholarship Archive. It has been accepted for inclusion in Human Rights Institute by an authorized administrator of Scholarship Archive. For more information, please contact scholarshiparchive@law.columbia.edu.



SAUDI ARABIA MUST BE HELD TO ACCOUNT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS IN YEMEN, SAY NGOS IN NEW REPORT

New report by leading Yemeni NGO and international human rights experts condemns Saudi airstrikes, and aid and travel restrictions, and urges UN to hold Saudi Arabia accountable

SANA'A and NEW YORK CITY (May 21, 2018) – The international community must scrutinize Saudi Arabia’s military operation in Yemen, and urge Saudi Arabia to cease its relentless bombing campaign and devastating restrictions on aid and access to healthcare, said the Mwatana Organization for Human Rights and Columbia Law School’s Human Rights Clinic in a new [report](#) submitted to the United Nations for the UN’s review of Saudi Arabia’s human rights record.

“No one has been spared in the war in Yemen—for more than three years, Saudi-led coalition airstrikes have killed and injured thousands of civilians, destroying homes, schools, hospitals, and even hitting weddings and funerals,” said Radhya Almutawakel, Chairperson of Mwatana Organization for Human Rights. “When governments review Saudi Arabia’s human rights record at the UN later this year, they must examine Saudi conduct not only in Saudi Arabia but also in Yemen, and offer recommendations to promote human rights and a peaceful solution to the conflict.”

The report, authored by international legal experts and experienced human rights investigators and based on the results of detailed investigations conducted in Yemen over the entire period of Saudi involvement in the war in Yemen, highlights the high rates of civilian casualties and the destruction of civilian infrastructure caused by Saudi-led coalition airstrikes. Mwatana has documented a number of incidents in which civilians were harmed where the presence of military targets was not evident, raising serious questions about Saudi Arabia’s compliance with its legal obligations.

The new report also explains how Saudi Arabia’s continued restriction of vital food imports and humanitarian aid to Yemen has exacerbated what the United Nations has described as the “worst humanitarian crisis in the world.” Yemen is currently facing the largest recorded cholera epidemic, and more than eight million Yemenis are at acute risk of famine. The report also details how Saudi Arabia’s closure of the Sana’a International Airport prevents civilians from accessing lifesaving healthcare and violates international law.

“Saudi Arabia must act to ensure that urgently needed humanitarian aid can reach Yemenis,” said Tamar Luster, LLM ’18, a student in the Human Rights Clinic who helped draft the UN

report. “Under international law, Saudi Arabia must allow rapid and unimpeded delivery of impartial aid and goods necessary for the Yemeni population, such as food, medicine, and fuel.”

This report will inform the review of Saudi Arabia’s human rights record through a process known as the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) at the UN Human Rights Council. Every country in the world is reviewed every five years through the UPR, and Saudi Arabia is up for review in November 2018. Saudi Arabia’s review comes at a key moment, with its conduct already under scrutiny following the launch in 2017 of a UN inquiry into the war in Yemen, and is a key opportunity for other countries to signal their concern about Saudi abuses in Yemen and offer recommendations to advance rights.

“Saudi Arabia’s impunity for its human rights violations against Yemenis must end,” said Junteng Zheng, LLM ’18, a student in the Human Rights Clinic who also worked on the UN report. “UN scrutiny of Saudi Arabia’s human rights record is critical because Saudi Arabia’s own investigations into its own wrongdoing have been so inadequate.”

In March 2015, an international coalition led by Saudi Arabia intervened in Yemen’s internal conflict by launching air strikes against the armed group Ansar Allah (the Houthis). The UN has documented “widespread violations of international law,” including possible war crimes, by all parties to the conflict. According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, as of late December 2017, more than 9,245 people have been killed, and more than 52,800 people injured by all parties to the conflict. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights reported in December 2017 that at least 5,558 of those killed and 9,065 of those injured were civilians.

The third cycle of Saudi Arabia’s Universal Periodic Review will take place during the 31st Session of the Human Rights Council from November 5-16, 2018.

The joint submission is available [here](#).

Media contacts: **Radhya Almutawakel** +967 1 210-755 | ralmutawakel@mwatana.org (Chairperson of Mwatana Center for Human Rights); **Sarah Knuckey** +1 212-854-9583 | sarah.knuckey@law.columbia.edu (Director of the Columbia Law School Human Rights Clinic); **Alex Moorehead** +1 212-854-1571 | amoorehead@law.columbia.edu (Director, Project on Counterterrorism, Armed Conflict and Human Rights, Columbia Law School Human Rights Institute).

Mwatana Organization for Human Rights (Mwatana), established in April 2013, is an independent Yemeni organization dedicated to defending and protecting human rights. Mwatana operates by carrying out accurate and objective field investigations and research in order to detect and stop human rights violations.

The Columbia Law School Human Rights Clinic works to advance human rights around the world, and to train the next generation of strategic advocates for social justice. The clinic works in partnership with civil society organizations and communities to carry out human rights investigations, legal and policy analysis, litigation, report-writing, and advocacy.