

In 2019 Saudi Arabia opened individual trials of 11 activists, most of them prominent women's rights advocates detained beginning in May 2018. They were accused of sharing information about women's rights in Saudi Arabia with journalists based on site, diplomats, and international human rights organisations, including Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International. These women are all victims of a wider crackdown on women human rights defenders, that started with the massive arrest of women human rights activists by Saudi authorities in May 2018. Upon the arrests, human rights organisations reported that Saudi interrogators tortured at least four of the women; besides practicing methods such as electric shocks and lashes, they were sexually harassed and assaulted.

1. Individual cases

Loujain al-Hathloul and Samar Badawi, both women's rights defenders and activists, were among the detainees, arrested prior to, or soon after lifting the driving ban in 2018.

a. Loujain al-Hathloul

Loujain is one of the most outspoken women human rights defenders in Saudi Arabia. She is currently detained in al-Ha'ir Prison, according to her brother, in reprisal for her peaceful campaigning against the driving ban and the male guardianship system, as well as for her political activities; while she stood for election in 2015, her name was never added to the ballot.



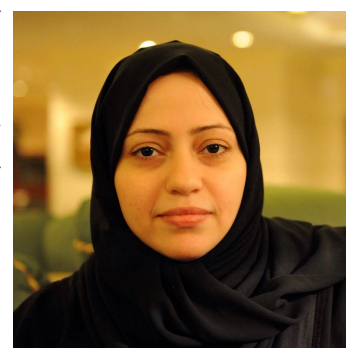
She was first detained in 2014 after she attempted to drive into Saudi Arabia from the United Arab Emirates. She was detained again in March 2018 after her participation in a review session of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia before the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. Emirati authorities arrested and took her to Riyadh for an interrogation that lasted 3 days, and resulted in the promulgation of a travel ban.

On 15 May 2018, Saudi police forces raided her home, arrested and held her incommunicado for days. Testimonies collected by [Amnesty International](#) report that Loujain al-Hathloul, while in detention, has been victim of torture and of a smear campaign carried out by Saudi authorities. She was finally brought twice before a court in March 2019, along with 10 other women. Her trial did not comply with international minimum standards; the charges were not specified, reporters and diplomats were barred from attending, and the Saudi Arabia's Public Prosecution rejected all allegations of torture and mistreatments. In April 2019, a hearing on her case was postponed with no reason given, and she has been held in solitary confinement for 10 months until her trial restarted in February 2020. As of today, Loujain al-Hathloul remains in detention and her case epitomises the wider crackdown women human rights defenders have been victims of since the massive arrest of human rights activists in May 2018.

b. Samar Badawi

Samar Badawi, a Saudi Arabian human rights activist and sister to jailed dissident blogger Raif Badawi, was first detained in April 2010 on charges filed by her father on her disobedience regarding the Saudi guardianship system. Upon her release in October 2010, the guardianship was transferred to her uncle. A year later, she participated in the women driving campaign to support women drivers with governmental procedures. Due to the restricted freedom of movement, female workers face massive obstacles in reaching voting boxes and getting to work. For her encouragement and inspiration to step up for women's rights in the Arabic countries, Samar Badawi earned in March 2012 the International Women of Courage Award by the US Department of State. Yet, her commitment to defend human rights did not stop there, she attended conferences to raise awareness and advocate human rights in Saudi Arabia, including a discussion at the UNHRC in Geneva and a meeting with the High Commissioner of Human Rights, Prince Zeid bin Ra'ad, in the US. Upon her return to Saudi Arabia, the Kingdom issued a travel ban, prohibiting her from participating in the EU NGOs Forum on Human Rights in Brussels.

In January 2016, Samar Badawi was subjected to her second arrest together with her 2-years-old daughter, Joud Badawi. After being interrogated and detained for almost 48 hours in the Dhahban central prison, both were freed on bail to report to the police in Jeddah for further interrogation. Two and a half years later, in July 2018, Samar Badawi faced, together with Nassima al-Saada, another arrest. According to [ADHRB](#), she was only referred to trial in March 2019, 8 months after her detention. In defense of Samar Badawi, Global Affairs Canada and Foreign Affairs Minister Chrystia Freeland called for [Samar's release](#). In response, the Kingdom ordered Canada's Ambassador, Dennis Horak, to leave the country within the next 24 hours and accused Chrystia Freeland of making false statements and interfering with Saudi national affairs. After freezing trade with Canada, Samar Badawi remains incarcerated in Dhahban Central Prison.



2. Recommendations

- *Saudia Arabia should immediately release all women's rights defenders and activists that were detained in relation to the lifting of the driving ban in 2018*
- *Saudi authorities should resolve/ban the male guardianship system and ensure all women equal rights, enabling them fundamental human rights such as freedom of movement as well as political and social rights*
- *The Kingdom should include women and women's rights defenders in any initiatives designed to empower women*
- *Saudi authorities should allow international monitors to enter the country and investigate torture allegations*
- *The Kingdom should also neutralize its relationship with Canada by lifting both, the freeze on trade and travel ban on the North American country and its ambassador.*