

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 19, 2016

The Honorable Barack Obama
The President
The White House
Washington, DC 20050

Dear Mr. President:

As you prepare for your upcoming trip to Saudi Arabia, we are writing to express concern regarding the Government of Saudi Arabia's continued treatment of human rights advocates, particularly the documented prosecutions of non-violent activists who are engaging in freedom of expression. Intolerance for freedom of speech and the imposition of travel bans and lengthy prison terms for peaceful dissidents harm Saudi Arabia's reputation internationally and stifle Saudi innovation and creativity. We are concerned that unless you make these issues a priority during your trip, human rights abuses will continue to occur with impunity and the full potential of the U.S.-Saudi relationship will continue to be impeded.

Specifically, we request you raise the case of blogger Raif Badawi, who was sentenced to 10 years in jail and 1,000 lashes for launching a website that suggested a peaceful discussion about religion. Mr. Badawi endured a first round of 50 lashes in January of 2015 but the remainder of his lashes has been postponed due to his health condition. During his unjust imprisonment, Mr. Badawi has been a recipient of prestigious international awards such as the Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought. We are also concerned for the case of Mr. Badawi's lawyer, prominent human rights activist Waleed Abu al-Khair, who was sentenced to 15 years in prison. Additionally, we are concerned about the 2014 travel ban placed on Mr. Badawi's sister Samar Badawi, for her activism defending human rights. In 2012, Ms. Badawi received the U.S. State Department's International Women of Courage Award. In recent months, Ms. Badawi has been called in for questioning by security forces on several occasions and is subject to ongoing harassment.

In your meeting with King Salman, we urge you to advocate for the immediate and unconditional release of Raif Badawi and Waleed Abu al-Khair. Additionally, we urge you to request that Ms. Badawi's travel ban be lifted and ensure that she is not harassed further for her work. This is an important time for Saudi Arabia to play a leadership role in the region and the world by setting an example of religious tolerance and civility.

We value the United States and Saudi Arabia close partnership and support efforts to find common approaches to addressing such critical issues as combating terrorism. However, true partners need to be able to have a frank dialogue about disagreements and areas of concern in our relationship. It is thus essential that the United States does not turn a blind eye to Saudi Arabia's human rights abuses.

Sincerely,



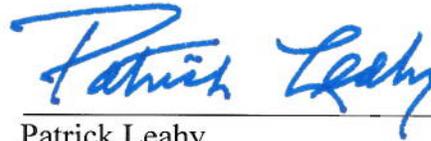
Marco Rubio
U.S. Senator



Richard J. Durbin
U.S. Senator



James E. Risch
U.S. Senator



Patrick Leahy
U.S. Senator



Ron Johnson
U.S. Senator