

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

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COMMERCE, SCIENCE, AND  
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SMALL BUSINESS AND  
ENTREPRENEURSHIP

March 26, 2014

The Honorable Barack Obama  
President of the United States of America  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Ave  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

I write to express my concern about religious freedom in Saudi Arabia in advance of your trip to Riyadh.

Saudi Arabia has been listed for nearly a decade as a Country of Particular Concern under the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998. This reflects our government's belief that infringements against basic rights are systematic, ongoing, and egregious. Law enforcement officials in Saudi Arabia regularly harass private prayer gatherings by non-Muslims, and the country's grand mufti has declared that all churches on the Arabian Peninsula should be destroyed. According to the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, "the Saudi government uses criminal charges of apostasy and blasphemy to suppress discussion and debate and to silence dissidents." In May 2013, the country's religious police announced that they had arrested over 200 individuals during the prior year on charges of sorcery. High school textbooks in Saudi Arabia contain highly inflammatory passages that dehumanize or call for violence against non-Wahhabi religious groups such as Christians, Jews, Hindus, Shi'ites and Sufis. According to the State Department's annual human rights report released last month, "objectionable content remains, even in revised text books" in Saudi Arabia.

In your speech last month to the National Prayer Breakfast, you explained that "promoting religious freedom is a key objective of U.S. foreign policy" because it is in America's interest to promote universal human rights, including with our allies. As you discuss pressing issues with King Abdullah, I urge you to raise the issue of religious freedom. As you know, there are millions of Christians, many foreign workers, unable to practice their faith without persecution, as all churches are banned. I hope you will raise this issue with King Abdullah. I also urge you to press him to release Raif Badawi, Sultan Hamid Marzooq al-Enezi, Saud Falih Awad al-Enezi, and other religious prisoners, and end state persecution of individuals charged with apostasy, blasphemy, and sorcery.

I was heartened when your ambassador- designate to the Kingdom, Dr. Joseph Westphal, told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that he will work with Saudi authorities on human rights and religious tolerance to ensure that they can achieve progress. Sustained interventions at the highest-levels of the U.S. Government are required to make progress on this issue with our Saudi partners. I hope you can start such an engagement with the Saudi leadership during your meetings in Riyadh this week.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'M. Rubio', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Marco Rubio  
United States Senator