

His Majesty King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud
King of Saudi Arabia and Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques
Office of His Majesty the King
Royal Court
Riyadh
Kingdom of Saudi Arabia



12 APRIL 2019

RECTOR'S OFFICE

NØRREGADE 10
DK - 1165 KØBENHAVN K

DIR 45 35335113

rektor@adm.ku.dk
www.ku.dk

Your Majesty,

As the Rector of the University of Copenhagen, I am writing as a member of the Scholars at Risk organisation (SAR), an international network of higher education institutions committed to protecting scholars. I wish to express my concern for the wellbeing and safety of Dr Hatoon al-Fassi, an associate professor at Kind Saud University and a well-known women's rights activist, who is currently detained.

In May 2018, the Saudi authorities began arresting activists and women's rights defenders with allegations of suspicious interactions with "foreign entities" and of supporting "foreign enemies". The Saudi authorities, however, have not publicly disclosed any evidence relating to these incarcerations. It is my understanding from SAR that the activity by the Saudi authorities is related to the activists' work, efforts and promotion of new government reforms, which resulted in a lift of the ban on women's right to drive in June 2018. Dr Hatoon al-Fassi, a leading figure in the activist work of the reform movement, had just received her driver's license and had publicly announced that she would celebrate the lifting of the ban, but she was confined between June 22 and 24 by the Saudi authorities.

I understand from SAR that there have been reports from sources regarding the ill-treatment and torture of detained women's rights defenders in Saudi Arabia. The sources state that Saudi interrogators have tortured Hatoon al-Fassi and other imprisoned women activists. Some have been released temporarily whilst Hatoon al-Fassi, among others, has been held incommunicado, and many have been subjected to smear campaigns by the Saudi authorities. The University of Copenhagen is extremely concerned by the imprisonment of Dr Hatoon al-Fassi, a scholar of women's history, in apparent retaliation for her peaceful exercise of human and women's rights in Saudi Arabia.

Saudi Arabia is a member of the UN Human Rights Council and therefore obligated to advocate and support the principles of fundamental human

rights. Nonetheless, Saudi Arabia has been unwilling to cooperate with the UN Council (UNCHR) and is still ignoring and disregarding human rights in the country. Last week, SAR signed a private letter in support of the imprisoned Saudi Professor Hatoon al-Fassi and several other women's and human rights defenders. The letter was sent to over 30 ministries of foreign affairs, asking governments to consider making a statement to the UN Human Rights Council. On March 7, Iceland made a statement to the Human Rights Council on behalf of 36 governments (Denmark included) seeking the release of these imprisoned Saudi scholars.

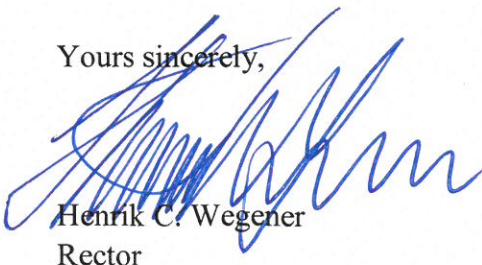
I hope to receive information or evidence that can help to explain the circumstances of the detention. Hatoon al-Fassi is imprisoned because of her non-violent exercise of human rights such as freedom of expression and freedom of association, both of which are protected by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the international covenant on Civil and Political Rights to which Saudi Arabia is a party.

As the Rector of the University of Copenhagen, I therefore respectfully ask for your positive intervention to urge the relevant authorities to release Hatoon Al-Fassi along with other wrongfully detained scholars and women's activists. I also ask that any charges filed against her connected to her peaceful exercise of the right to freedom of expression be dropped. Pending this, I kindly ask that you immediately ensure her well-being while in prison, including humane treatment and access to medical care, legal counsel and family. Finally, I call on you to ensure an independent investigation into the allegations of torture and to otherwise ensure that any case against her will proceed in a manner consistent with Saudi Arabia's obligations and responsibilities under international law, including those relating to due process and fair trial.

Protecting and promoting the peaceful exercise of human rights is an essential component to building strong higher education sectors, also in Saudi Arabia.

I highly appreciate your attention to this matter and look forward to your reply.

Yours sincerely,



Henrik C. Wegener
Rector