

117TH CONGRESS
2D SESSION

H. RES. 1444

Condemning the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's inhumane treatment of Salma al-Shehab and other women's rights defenders.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

OCTOBER 21, 2022

Ms. SPEIER (for herself and Ms. LOIS FRANKEL of Florida) submitted the following resolution; which was referred to the Committee on Foreign Affairs

RESOLUTION

Condemning the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's inhumane treatment of Salma al-Shehab and other women's rights defenders.

Whereas, on January 15, 2018, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia arrested Salma al-Shehab under suspicion of terrorism for "assisting those who seek to cause public unrest and destabilize civil and national security by following their twitter accounts";

Whereas these charges cited statements made on Twitter in which al-Shehab supported women's rights defenders who had been detained for protesting the Kingdom's guardianship system;

Whereas al-Shehab was detained without trial for over 9 months and initially sentenced to 6 years in prison by the Specialized Criminal Court;

Whereas, on or around August 9, 2022, the Specialized Criminal Court resented al-Shehab to 34 years in prison and a nonconcurrent 34-year travel ban;

Whereas the Specialized Criminal Court's sentence is the longest punishment known of a peaceful women's rights activist in the Kingdom;

Whereas al-Shehab has been subjected to solitary confinement, prolonged interrogation, abuse, harassment, and given medications which caused drowsiness;

Whereas, on August 29, 2022, 35 nongovernmental organizations, including Freedom House, condemned al-Shehab's arrest and sentencing as arbitrary and unlawful, and characterized her sentence as "an alarming deterioration of the human rights situation in the country";

Whereas, on August 29, 2022, the same nongovernmental organizations warned that activists and human rights defenders continue to be "ruthlessly targeted and silenced, with repressive laws being used to criminalize their peaceful expression and activism";

Whereas, in May 2018, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia arrested 12 women's rights defenders including, Loujain al-Hathloul, Aziza al-Yousef, Eman al-Nafjan, Nouf Abdelaziz, Mayaa al-Zahrani, Samar Badawi, Nassima al-Saada, and Hatoon al-Fassi;

Whereas Human Rights Watch reported that at least 3 of the detained activists were subjected to torture, including electrical shocks, whipping, and sexual assault;

Whereas while Loujain al-Hathloul was released from prison in February 2021, the ongoing travel ban and threat of the suspended sentence prevents her freedom of expression as she could be reimprisoned at any time;

Whereas the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia targets human rights defenders under severe terrorism and cybercrime laws and they are routinely subject to arbitrary arrests and unlawful detentions;

Whereas the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia fails to investigate and reform the penal system which allows for the aforementioned torture and mistreatment of human right defenders like Salma al-Shehab; and

Whereas the United States supports the freedom of speech and expression, right to fair and open judicial proceedings, and humane treatment of prisoners globally: Now, therefore, be it

1 *Resolved*, That the House of Representatives—

2 (1) denounces the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia’s
3 guardianship system and the arbitrary arrests, un-
4 lawful sentences, and inhumane treatments of Salma
5 al-Shehab and other human rights defenders;

6 (2) denounces the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia’s
7 draconian use of travel bans and suspended sen-
8 tences to silence human rights defenders, journalists,
9 activists, and others;

10 (3) urges the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to im-
11 mediately release Salma al-Shehab and other un-
12 justly detained human rights defenders; and

13 (4) urges the President to direct the Depart-
14 ment of State to leverage diplomatic pressure on the
15 Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to release Salma al-
16 Shehab and other human rights defenders and dis-

- 1 courage the Kingdom from future arrests and deten-
- 2 tions of this nature.

