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Americans for Democracy and Human Rights in Bahrain (ADHRB)  
Beyond the Bomb · Center for International Policy · CODEPINK  
Democracy for the Arab World Now (DAWN) · Demand Progress · Equality Now  
The European Centre for Democracy and Human Rights (ECDHR) · Freedom Forward  
The Freedom Initiative · Historians for Peace and Democracy · Just Foreign Policy  
MENA Rights Group · Peace Action · Saudi American Justice Project (SAJP)  
United for Peace and Justice · Western New York Peace Center

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August 17, 2020

Dear World Trade Organization Members,

We write to urge you to reject Saudi Arabia's nominee, Mr. Mohammad Maziad al-Tuwaijri, for Director General of the World Trade Organization. As a former high-ranking government official in Saudi Arabia, Mr. al-Tuwaijri has long been complicit in the Saudi government's human rights violations and has chosen to remain silent on his government's brutal record of repression.

Mr. al-Tuwaijri is Saudi Arabia's former Minister of Economy and Planning. He is currently an advisor to the Saudi monarchy's Royal Court and a board member of the Public Investment Fund (PIF). PIF is Saudi Arabia's sovereign wealth fund, and it has been connected to a number of murders of Saudi activists. PIF has been described as the "[world's least transparent](#)" sovereign wealth fund.

While Mr. al-Tuwaijri served as minister from November of 2017 until March of 2020, Saudi Arabia's government conducted one of the worst crackdowns against human rights defenders and peaceful dissidents in the country's recent history. Mr. al-Tuwaijri chose to remain silent during this time. The Saudi state's crackdown included the arbitrary detention of businessmen and economists, the detention and torture of several prominent women's rights defenders and civil society members, and the brutal murder of Jamal al-Khashoggi in 2018. While many are still prisoners of conscience, at least two prisoners, Dr. Abdullah al-Hamid and journalist Saleh al-Shehi have died at the hands of the regime.

The Saudi government has a long record of abusing international and diplomatic privileges to break the law and compromise the security of citizens and the global community. The Saudi government continues to destabilize regional economies, oppose democratic movements, and commit atrocities in the Saudi-led war in Yemen.

*We urge the World Trade Organization Selection Committee to oppose Saudi Arabia's pursuit of this position of power and to reject Mr. al-Tuwaijri as an unsuitable and ethically compromised candidate for the position of Director General of the World Trade Organization for the following reasons:*

**1. The Saudi Public Investment Fund (of which Mr. al-Tuwaijri is a board member) is complicit in human rights violations and the murders of Saudi activists:**

The Saudi Public Investment Fund serves as an instrument of power for Saudi ruler Mohammad Bin Salman, and the Wall Street Journal has reported that the PIF is likely to be the world's [least transparent sovereign wealth fund](#). The Saudi state has previously used [PIF to hire public relations firms in New York to whitewash the murder of Jamal Khashoggi](#). Not only that, but PIF's NEOM project led to the displacement of at least 20,000 members of the al-Huwaitat tribe and [the murder of Abdulrahim al-Huwaiti](#) in April of 2020.

## **2. Mr. Al-Tuwaijri served as Minister of Economy during the Saudi government's lawless detention and torture of Saudi business and political elites:**

The illegal mass detention and [torture of dozens of business and former government elites](#) starting in November of 2017 and continuing to the present has been used by the current regime to consolidate wealth and power in the country. One of the prisoners detained in the Ritz Carlton of Riyadh, Major General Ali AlQahtani, was even [tortured to death](#) in December of 2017. Writer and economist [Saleh al-Shehi was also detained and sentenced](#) to prison in January of 2018 after criticizing the "anti-corruption crackdown." He was sentenced to five years in prison for insulting the royal court, of which Mr. al-Tuwaijri is an advisor to. Mr. al-Shehi died in July of 2020 due to the Saudi government's medical negligence against prisoners of conscience. In March of 2020, the Saudi government conducted a mass arrest of nearly 300 more government officials, demonstrating that the Saudi state's lawless and brutal behavior continues to this day.

## **3. The Saudi Arabian economy benefits from the "Kafala" system, a form of modern-day slavery:**

Human Rights Watch has documented how foreign workers [have been enslaved](#) under the sponsorship system and how Saudi women trapped under male guardianship [have described it as slavery](#). The sponsorship ("kafala") system in Saudi Arabia requires every foreign resident in the Kingdom to be legally registered under a sponsor. The sponsor's approval is required for the foreign resident to exit or enter the country, maintain legal status in the country, access health care, change jobs, or be released from prison. They can additionally declare a "non-compliant" individual under their sponsorship as a "runaway," subjecting them to arrest or deportation. Many under sponsorship have been victims of wage discrimination and even subjected to forced labor.

## **4. Saudi Arabia systemically discriminates against women:**

Government universities and ministries in Saudi Arabia require segregation of men and women by law. Separate is not equal, and this enforced segregation has led to severe disadvantages for women in the workplace and economy. Male guardianship laws in Saudi Arabia automatically grant men legal decision-making authority over their female dependents. Women continue to face serious consequences in Saudi courts for working full time or disobeying their husbands or guardians, making economic empowerment and equality of women impossible.

## **5. Saudi Arabia does not Protect Religious Freedom:**

Saudi Arabia's [Basic Law of Governance](#) does not permit the public practice of religions other than Islam. Unlike its neighbors which offer choices for non-Muslim residents to be tried under civil law in courts, Saudi Arabia subjects all residents and citizens to be tried under the state's strict interpretation of Islamic law in court cases. [Saudi Arabia beheaded 184 individuals in 2019](#), half of them foreign nationals. U.S. State Department noted several executions in Saudi Arabia have been for "politically active religious minorities," including a mass execution of the country's Shia minority.

## **6. Saudi Arabia's Record for Arbitrary Detention & Torture of Human Rights Defenders**

Saudi Arabia has imprisoned, tortured, and even killed prominent human rights advocates, including critics of government economic practices and corruption. The government must release economist Essam al-Zamel, reformer Salman Alodah, aid worker Abdulrahman al-Sadhan, human rights advocate Waleed Abu al-Khair, the imprisoned members of the Saudi Association for Civil and

Political Rights (ACPRA), women's rights activists Loujain al-Hathloul, Samar Badawi, Naseema al-Sada, Nouf Abdulaziz and Maya al-Zahrani, as well as imprisoned men who have advocated for women's rights, and all those detained for exercising their fundamental freedoms.

## **7. Saudi Arabia's Economy is a main driver of the climate crisis:**

State-owned Saudi Aramco is the world's largest contributor to global greenhouse gas emissions among corporate fossil fuel producers. Saudi Arabia also has an extensive record of undermining global climate negotiations.

### **Conclusion:**

Saudi Arabia is not a free or transparent state, and individuals who speak out or are critical of the government risk arrest and even death, regardless of their rank or title. As every minister is hand-selected and appointed to power by royal decree, they all are in close relationship with the de-facto leader Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman.

The WTO would place its institutional integrity at great risk if it were to select a senior representative of an authoritarian and lawless government as WTO Director General. We urge you to reject Saudi Arabia's nomination of Mr. al-Tuwaijiri, who has been complicit in the human rights violations of the government he has represented. We instead encourage WTO members to consider the values of human rights, the strength of diversity, commitment to the rule of law, and the need for new perspectives in global leadership in your selection process.

Sincerely,

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