

Saudi Arabia in Focus

The monthly update from the Saudi Embassy in Brussels



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From the ambassador

Since 1967, when the Saudi Mission to the European Union was established, we have worked together in a spirit of exchange and mutual respect. The fruitful relationship that we have enjoyed over this past half-century has allowed us to grow our trade relations and find common ground on some of the most pressing foreign policy issues of the day. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the EU stand together on a wide range of issues, be it the need for a Middle East peace process, the fight against terrorism, support for international development programmes, safeguarding the supply of energy, putting an end to the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction or minimising the impact of global warming. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, like the EU, is committed to peace and security, to innovation and social promotion, to sustainable development and fair trade. I hope that the celebration of the 50th anniversary of our cooperation and of the 87th Saudi National day in September will inspire further exchanges and an even closer partnership for the years to come.



Ambassador Abdulrahman S. Alahmed

More than two million Muslims gathered for Hajj



Around 2.3 million Muslims participated to the Hajj pilgrimage that took place between August 30 and September 4.

This number has considerably increased comparing to the past four editions, partly due to the end of quotas reduction. More and more women are also travelling to the Kingdom. They represented almost half of the pilgrims this year.

“Saudi Arabia welcomes the world” was this year Hajj’s message greeting pilgrims in the Kingdom from more than 160 different countries. The came from Europe and North America to Indonesia and Pakistan, from India and Bangladesh to Egypt and Turkey but also Iran, Qatar and Yemen. The eight British citizens who reached Saudi Arabia by bike riding more than 3000 kilometres in six weeks to raise £1 million for medical aid to Syria, deserve a special mention for their commitment.

The Saudi authorities greeted the success of a safe 2017 pilgrimage that has gone off without any particular problems. Mecca province governor Prince Khaled al-Faisal, who heads the central Hajj committee, notably declared: “I am proud today to have offered these services and I am proud of all my brothers who participated and I am proud of each pilgrim who came to this land and assisted in the success of this season”.

The movements of such a large and diverse crowd of people in a short period of time constitute a real logistical challenge for the Saudi authorities. This year the Kingdom had specifically reinforced security measures with more than 100,000 security forces to assist pilgrims and the installation of cameras to secure the journey. Additional doctors, nurses, ambulances and mobile health centres were also deployed in the areas of Hajj.

In the pilgrimage rooms of Jeddah and Medina’s international airports the Ministry of Hajj and Omra had put in place a wide range of welcome programmes and gifts to facilitate the pilgrims’ stay in the Kingdom.



Investigating Alleged Human Rights Violations in Yemen

The Yemeni National Commission to investigate alleged violations to human rights in the country has issued its third report covering the period September 2016 to June 2017.

The Commission investigates all violations related to international human rights law and international humanitarian law that occurred on the territory of Yemen.

The Commission is currently the only entity that is present in all parts of the country.



The Chairman of the National Committee on Investigation of Allegations of Human Rights Violations in Yemen hands over its 3rd Report to Abd Rabbuh Mansour Hadi, President of the Republic of Yemen

According to the latest report, a total of 17,123 alleged cases of various types of human rights violations in different provinces of the country have been reported between September 2016 and June 2017. The National Commission paid particular attention to indiscriminate attacks resulting in the killing and injuring of 7,817 civilians, mostly due to Houthi militia and Saleh forces.

The Houthi militia and Saleh forces are also deemed exclusively responsible for 176 cases of recruiting children below the age of 15 as child soldiers in the ongoing armed conflict in Yemen, 362 cases of laying anti-personal mines and the destruction of 384 houses.

In its investigations, the National Commission has also noted some cases of attacks against cultural properties. The Houthi militia and Saleh forces are held responsible in five of those cases, while the national army and Arab coalition air force have been held responsible in two cases.

Amongst the violations committed by different parties and armed groups related to international human rights law, the following cases were investigated: extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearance and detention, torture and drone attacks.

Given the on-going hostilities, the members of the Commission will continue their investigations and monitoring of activities before releasing their final report. The investigators have been facing a number of challenges such as the broad geographical areas covered, the number of entities which are responsible for human rights violations and the refusal by some parties to cooperate.

In the meantime, the National Commission urges all parties to the armed conflict to adhere to the principle of discriminating between civilians and combatants to avoid inflicting any further damage on the civilian population.

It issues specific recommendations to the Houthi militia and Saleh forces, notably to stop targeting residential neighbourhoods, to allow the delivery of aid to civilians, to stop the practice of recruiting child soldiers and to refrain from using anti-personnel landmines.

The Arab Coalition to Support Legitimacy in Yemen is asked by the Commission to review its rules of engagement to ensure full adherence to international humanitarian law, to better assess the damages resulting from air strikes, as well as to regularly update the list of facilities that must be excluded from military activities to better safeguard civilians.



The wide ranging and continuous humanitarian support by KSRelief



KSRelief General Supervisor Abdullah Al-Rabeeh meeting the UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres during a recent visit at UN headquarter

Dr. Abdullah Al-Rabiah, Advisor at Royal Court and General Supervisor of King Salman Center for Humanitarian Relief (KSRelief) met on Friday 18th of August with UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres in the margin of the World Humanitarian Day in New York.

The meeting was an opportunity to discuss the cooperation between KSRelief and the UN on many humanitarian issues.

Cooperation between KSRelief and the UN

Dr. Abdullah Al-Rabiah highlighted the Kingdom's humanitarian role, performed by KSRelief in crisis worldwide, by presenting the 231 projects financed (at a cost of \$761.9 million) by the Kingdom in 38 different countries, among which Yemen, Syria, Myanmar, Somalia, Burkina Faso, Mauritania, Tajikistan, Iraq, Palestine and Ethiopia. He said Saudi development assistance stood at 1.9 percent of its gross domestic product (GDP) in 2014, compared to the UN-approved rate of 0.70 percent. "Saudi Arabia has extended aid to disaster-affected people irrespective of their religion, race or color", added Abdullah Al-Rabeeh.

Various examples of Saudi aid efforts have been mentioned during the meeting: In April 2015, the Kingdom has responded to a UN's urgent appeal and pledged the full amount of the appeal that reached \$274 million. It also pledged \$150 million at the Yemen Donors Conference in Geneva in April 2017.

Finally, KSRelief responded to a UN appeal, represented by UNICEF and WHO, for cholera epidemic needs with an amount of \$66.7 million. King Salman Fund will further support the World Health Organization with an additional \$2.8 million.

KSRelief efforts in Yemen

The meeting particularly focused on the efforts undertaken in Yemen by KSRelief which has implemented 153 projects in areas such as relief, humanitarian and shelter aid, environmental sanitation programs, and agricultural and water support programs.

KSRelief's chief notably pointed out that they are active in all parts of Yemen through 86 national and local partners, "including areas controlled by the Houthis".

From April 2015 to August 2017, Saudi assistance to Yemen stood at \$8.27 billion, while that provided by KSRelief stood at \$911.9 million. Assistance to Yemenis in the Kingdom also reached \$1.13 billion.

KSRelief projects in Syria

At a press conference later in the week, Al-Rabeeh also highlighted the efforts undertaken by Saudi Arabia in Syria, where it was one of the first countries to support the Syrian people. He reminded that the Kingdom received 2.5 million Syrians and that hundreds of thousands of them were allowed to enter the labour market. It also guarantees the education of 114,000 Syrian students in its schools free of charge.

The need to protect humanitarian and relief workers

Finally, addressing the World Humanitarian Day Conference, Al-Rabeeh urged the international community to attach great importance to protecting humanitarian and relief workers, as well as beneficiaries of their services. He said support and finance to any individual, group or state for any form of violence or terror against innocent citizens or relief and humanitarian workers is a despicable act and a flagrant violation of international and humanitarian law. "We have to exert maximum efforts to safeguard the lives of relief workers and those receiving humanitarian and relief assistance" he concluded.



A new innovative platform for investment



Under the patronage of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Salman, in the context of the implementation of Vision 2030, Saudi Arabia's blueprint programme of reform, the Kingdom launches in Riyadh next 24 October the Future Investment Initiative (FII).

Hosted and organized by the Public Investment Fund (PIF) of Saudi Arabia, the Kingdom's main investment arm and one of the world's leading sovereign wealth funds, the FII aims to be a game-changing platform exploring new trends and opportunities that will shape the world economy and investment environment over the coming decades.

This invitation-only event is designed around three key pillars: shifting centers of power, the new investment paradigm and innovation for a better world. Under the leadership of Crown Prince Muhammad Bin Salman, the event will gather internationally-renowned business and investment leaders from Europe and across the globe.

According to Yasir Bin Othman Al-Rumayyan, Managing Director of Saudi Public Investment Fund, this initiative "will also act as a platform to showcase the PIF's redefined investment mandate and strategy, as it progresses towards becoming the world's largest sovereign wealth fund".

Women empowerment a universal concern

Ms Hoda Al-Helaissi, a member of Saudi Arabia's Shoura Council and former Vice-Chairperson at King Saud University, stressed the importance of addressing gender inequality and women empowerment as "universal concerns" of the global community, when intervening in a recent panel debate at the UN in Geneva.



She called upon international decision-makers to recognize the change that takes place in the Arab region and support that change rather than merely perpetuate the static stereotypical image of women in the region. In her words "a country's true development, economic growth and international success can only come about when it uses its human resources to its fullest – male and female."

They said...

>> *"The solution to the dispute with Qatar is in Doha's hands"*

Saudi Arabia's Foreign Minister
Adel Al-Jubeir

In Brief

Saudi Arabia qualifies for the 2018 Football World Cup

More than 65 000 spectators, among whom Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, were present on September 9 at the King Abdullah Sports City Stadium in Jeddah to watch Saudi Arabia beat Japan (1-0).

With this victory, the Saudi Football team finishes second in its group to become the 8th country to be officially qualified for the Football 2018 World Cup in Russia. Iran is also among the selected teams from the Asia area whereas Qatar, despite its sporting ambitions, has failed to qualify.

It will be the country's 5th participation in the World Cup, after qualifying for the first time back in 1994. The team featured in three consecutive World Cups afterwards (1998, 2002 and 2006) before missing the last two editions in South Africa 2010 and Brazil 2014. World Cup 2018 will be held in Russia from June 14 to July 15 2018.

