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November 16, 2015

Prince Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein
United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)
Palais des Nations
CH-1211 Geneva 10, Switzerland

Dear Prince Al Hussein:

We at the Secular Policy Institute, a secular government think tank and human rights advocacy organization, and the undersigned organizations call on the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) to reconsider its appointment of Saudi Arabia to the Consultative Group for the 2016 session.

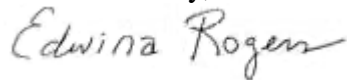
The UNHRC's website prominently features a 2007 quote by Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, "All victims of human rights abuses should be able to look to the Human Rights Council as a forum and a springboard for action." The UNHRC is a body elected to three-year terms by the General Assembly, of UN Member-States, representing five global regions through 47-seats with a two-consecutive term limit. In the election of these seats, the General Assembly is directed to take into account how the candidate-states have contributed to the promotion and protection of human rights-and the voluntary pledges of those states to commit to human rights in general. In this process, it is expected that the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia would inevitably hold a seat, yet it is thoroughly peculiar that a state with the Kingdom's reputation of aversion to basic human rights would be appointed to a leadership position for even a single year on a board selecting Special Rapporteurs for investigating the most flagrant of human rights abuses.

The Consultative Group is tasked with reviewing and assigning applicants to serve as "Special Rapporteurs" and other "Independent Investigators" for human rights abuses around the planet. These UN mandates include: Extrajudicial, Summary, or Arbitrary Executions; Freedom of Assembly and Association; Freedom of Opinion and Expression; Freedom of Religion or Belief; Human Rights Defenders; Independence of Judges and Lawyers; Torture; and the Discrimination Against Women in Law and Practice Working Group. Saudi Arabia will be chairing the panel alongside Lithuania, Greece, Chile and Algeria. Though no country is perfectly-vacant of human rights abuses of one kind or another, extending any level of immediate, discretionary authority to Saudi Arabia over those who would otherwise monitor or analyze human rights abuses (especially in the aforementioned areas) would do a grave disservice to those most vulnerable to persecution and harm around the globe-those whom the UNHRC was designed to protect.

Saudi Arabia did not sign the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and International Convention on Civil and Political Rights. Beyond the high profile cases of condemning a teenager (Ali Mohammed al-Nimr) to death for participating in protesting for democracy, and sentencing a blogger (Raif Badawi) to degrading physical abuse and a lengthy prison sentence for expressing critique; the Kingdom sentenced Saudi rights lawyer Walid abu al-Khair to 15 years for “breaking allegiance” to the monarchy by founding and directing the organization “Monitor of Human Rights in Saudi Arabia.” If the Kingdom cannot demonstrate the integrity to allow human rights monitoring from within, they certainly cannot be trusted to have a legitimate voice in protecting them from without.

Though by being a UN-member state, Saudi Arabia has eligibility for a seat on the UNHRC, with the critical nature of protecting those most vulnerable to persecution and other human rights abuses in line with the mission and commitments of the UNHRC; because of their long history of a flagrant disregard for basic human rights we request reconsideration or probationary status applied to Saudi Arabia’s inclusion in the Consultative Group.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Edwina Rogers".

Edwina Rogers
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