

The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) sent the following letter on June 21, 2010.

The President
The White House
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

On behalf of the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), I am writing to you regarding your meeting with the King of Saudi Arabia when he visits Washington, DC at the end of this month.

In May, Saudi Arabia's top religious leadership, the Council of Senior Ulema, issued a fatwa condemning the financing of terrorism as a criminal act in the country. This was a very important and most welcome development, and the Saudis should be commended. For the objective of this religious edict to be realized, however, it will be necessary for the Saudi government to implement effective strategies for preventing people from embracing violent extremism in the first place. They will need to focus on reforms that ensure that intolerance has no place in their culture. Despite the Saudi government pledging to the United States nearly four years ago that it would undertake such reforms, very little progress has been made. In this regard, we appeal to you to raise three important issues: revising the Saudi government-controlled curriculum and textbooks; reining in the government-funded Commission to Promote Virtue and Prevent Vice (CPVPV), or religious police; and releasing Hadi Al-Mutif, the longest serving religious prisoner in Saudi Arabia.

In July 2006, the Saudi government confirmed to the State Department that it would revise textbooks, within one to two years, to remove intolerant references that disparage Muslims or non-Muslims or promote hatred toward other religions or religious groups. This promise remains unfulfilled. The Saudi government's ideology of extreme religious intolerance, including violence, is propounded in Saudi textbooks and other educational materials. Saudi Arabia makes these publications available on the internet and through their distribution internationally. USCIRF found earlier this year that textbooks posted on the Saudi Ministry of Education's website continue to teach hatred toward other religions and, in some cases, promote violence. In addition, the most recent State Department reports on human rights and religious freedom confirm that inflammatory content remains in the textbooks.

Regarding the role of religious police, in July 2006, the Saudi government confirmed to the State Department that members of the CPVPV would not detain or conduct investigations of

suspects, implement punishment, violate the sanctity of private homes, conduct surveillance, or confiscate private religious materials. Nearly four years later, members of the CPVPV regularly overstep their authority with impunity and are not subject to judicial review. Despite the fact that the CPVPV is not permitted to engage in surveillance, detain individuals for more than 24 hours, arrest individuals without police accompaniment, or carry out any kind of punishment, its members have been accused in recent years of killing, beating, whipping, detaining, and otherwise harassing individuals. Saudi government officials claim to have dismissed and/or disciplined members of the CPVPV for abuses of power, although reports of abuse persist and no details have been provided demonstrating that CPVPV members are, in fact, held accountable.

The case of Mr. Al-Mutif, an Ismaili Muslim from southwestern Saudi Arabia, also warrants attention. He has been in prison for more than 16 years for an offhand remark he made as a teenager in 1993 that was deemed blasphemous by a Saudi court. In 1996 he was convicted and originally sentenced to death for apostasy, despite the fact that he remains a Muslim. Lawyers and experts familiar with the case have said that the judge was biased against Ismaili Muslims and that Mr. Al-Mutif's trial was neither fair nor transparent. Mr. Al-Mutif has alleged physical abuse and mistreatment during his 16 years of incarceration. USCIRF repeatedly has raised this case and was told by Saudi government authorities that there would be a resolution. More than three years after such assurances, Mr. Al-Mutif remains in prison, much of the time in solitary confinement, where he reportedly has attempted to commit suicide because of the dire situation. Mr. President, USCIRF recommends that you urge King Abdullah to immediately and unconditionally release Hadi Al-Mutif on humanitarian grounds.

We are most grateful for your considering our request that these important issues be raised in your discussions with King Abdullah.

Respectfully,
Leonard Leo
Chair

cc:

The Honorable Hillary Rodham Clinton, Secretary of State
Ambassador Jeffrey D. Feltman, Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs
Michael H. Posner, Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights and Labor
Samantha Power, Special Assistant to the President and Senior Director for Multilateral Affairs, National Security Council
Puneet Talwar, Special Assistant to the President and Senior Director for the Gulf States, Iran and Iraq, National Security Council

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USCIRF is an independent, bipartisan U.S. federal government commission. USCIRF Commissioners are appointed by the President and the leadership of both political parties in the

Senate and the House of Representatives. USCIRF's principal responsibilities are to review the facts and circumstances of violations of religious freedom internationally and to make policy recommendations to the President, the Secretary of State and Congress.

To interview a USCIRF Commissioner, contact Tom Carter, Communications Director at tcarter@uscirf.gov

or

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