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Working with activists in my capacity as ADHRB's Legal Officer, I have regularly confronted systems of criminal procedure that make no pretense to impartiality. I have analyzed cases in which courts subjected defendants to double jeopardy, prosecutors pushed for capital punishment in the absence of evidence, and judges ignored credible allegations that acts of torture occurred during investigations. Regarding Saudi Arabia, I have reported on a legal system in which human rights defenders are treated as terrorists, criminal sentences are delivered *ad hoc*, and the judiciary plays a subordinate role to the monarchy.

As discouraging as these developments are, I find the work of Waleed Abu al-Khair to be a consistent source of hope. Waleed and other human rights advocates have taken the long view, advancing sharp critiques of the Saudi legal system's deficiencies while promoting structural reforms that would advance both criminal justice and human rights in the country. At the same time, he has put these ideas to work, utilizing the stunted tools provided by an unequal justice system to represent activists and marginalized individuals who may not have otherwise secured legal representation.

The reforms for which he has advocated, if applied, would strengthen society by decriminalizing political expression and putting everyone, no matter their religious sect, family history, or personal connections, on equal footing before impartial law. Waleed and compatriots like Mohammed al-Qahtani, Sulaiman al-Rashoudi, and others arrested in the course of reforming Saudi law have worked to realize a country that would be stable and free for all Saudi citizens for decades to come. If Saudi officials care not merely for their own ambitions but rather about the long-term health of their country, they will release these men immediately.

Sincerely,

R. James Suzano, JD
Acting Director of Advocacy and Legal Officer
Americans for Democracy & Human Rights in Bahrain