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✉ contact@hrf.org

☎ +1 (212) 246-8486

X person
Organization
% X and X persons
Via email

October 30, 2020

Dear NAME,

According to a public list of participants, the Human Rights Foundation (HRF) is aware that you will be speaking at the Think 20 (T20) summit hosted by Saudi Arabia from Saturday, October 31 to Sunday, November 1, 2020.

Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MBS) is the individual who authorized and is financing your attendance at this event. I am writing to urgently inform you of the human rights crisis in Saudi Arabia and to request that, in light of your status as a public intellectual of global stature, you cancel your participation as a symbol of solidarity with the ongoing repression of the Saudi people under MBS' regime.

Saudi Arabia is among the worst violators of basic individual rights, and, in particular, the right to freedom of opinion and expression. For decades, the Saudi government has harassed, arrested, and jailed dissidents, violating their freedom of expression, opinion, and assembly.

Despite recent initiatives that seek to promote a more moderate and modern image of the country through global engagement and cosmetic social reforms, the Kingdom regularly engages in the systematic repression of human rights defenders, often leading to numerous years of imprisonment, without trial, and the use of repressive measures against them.

You are scheduled to attend a state-sponsored event hosted by one of the most repressive regimes on earth — a country whose leader has also led a relentless campaign to silence any opposition to the regime.

And yet, the restrictions outlined above will not apply to attendees of the T20 conference, who will be able to freely discuss some of the most important problems of the day, such as climate change, immigration, and the economy.

It is convenient, however, that the issue of authoritarianism, which is responsible for most of the world's conflicts, famines and economic crises, has been omitted from the topics of discussion at the T20 conference. This is no accident. The Saudi regime is happy to pay

international experts to give the Kingdom a veneer of respectability and facade of inclusivity so long as the domestic crises within Saudi Arabia are never mentioned.

On this latter topic, the conference will feature panels on “Promoting Inclusivity to Empower Women and Youth,” “Women’s Engagement, Empowerment, and Inclusion for Greater Economic Prosperity – What’s Working, What’s Not?” and a keynote speech about “Female Inclusion – Actionable Pathways from Tokenism to Transformation.”

Outside the curated boundaries of this conference, however, Saudi women are treated like second-class citizens. They cannot fully and freely access education and healthcare services, get married, or exit prison without permission from a male relative.

Worse, several Saudi women’s rights activists, including Loujain al-Hathloul, Samar Badawi, Nassima al-Sadah, and Nouf Abdulaziz, are currently in prison for having peacefully campaigned against this anachronistic male guardianship system, which enables a permanent violation of their human rights. They have been subjected to torture that includes — but is most certainly not limited to — electric shocks, flogging, sexual abuse, and prolonged solitary confinement.

By participating in the T20 conference, you will be helping to improve the public image of a regime that responds to an individual’s freedom of thought with torture and even murder. The murder of Washington Post columnist Jamal Khashoggi and the cover-up of the crime is perhaps the most brazen example of the brutality that MBS is willing to exert in order to silence his critics.

The UN Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, Agnès Callamard, investigated the murder and concluded unambiguously that the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is responsible for the crime, and called on companies and organizations to “establish explicit policies to avoid entering into deals with businesses, business people, and organs of the State that have had a direct or indirect role in Khashoggi’s execution or other grave human rights violations.”

We believe that the goal of this conference is to whitewash the Saudi regime’s crimes by allowing Saudi Arabia to present itself as a progressive, forward-thinking country instead of the authoritarian dictatorship it actually is. By hosting panels on women’s rights, international cooperation, and economic security, the Saudi regime wishes to distract the world from the terrible conditions for women in the Kingdom, the war it is perpetuating in Yemen, and the repressive conditions citizens of the Kingdom face every day.

You are a public figure with vast influence in the media. MBS counts on using and manipulating that influence — as he repeatedly does with numerous organizations, unsuspecting Hollywood celebrities, music festivals, and business summits — to bolster his own reputation and regain credibility, both locally and abroad. Instead, we urge you to use your platform to



promote human rights in Saudi Arabia and contribute to a mission of increasing global democratic freedoms.

Considering the information above, HRF believes that your participation in an event sponsored by a murderous, repressive regime involved in gross human rights violations — especially of women — would be highly unfortunate.

HRF asks you to urgently consider canceling your participation at the T20 conference.

If, nevertheless, you do decide to attend, HRF urges you to use your platform to speak out for the Saudi people during your speaking time, bringing attention to the repressive Saudi regime and the draconian laws it enforces.

If you have any questions, you can contact me at (212) 246-8486 or by email at info@hrf.org.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Thor Halvorssen', written in a cursive style.

Thor Halvorssen
President
Human Rights Foundation

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Garry Kasparov', written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish at the bottom.

Garry Kasparov
Chairman
Human Rights Foundation