To: Princess Reema Bint Bandar bin Sultan bin Abdulaziz Al Saud
Ambassador, Embassy of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
601 New Hampshire Ave NW
Washington DC, 20037

April 30th 2021

We, the undersigned organizations, join the family of Abdulrahman Al-Sadhan in condemning his unjust sentence of 20 years in prison to be followed by a 20-year travel ban by Saudi Arabia’s Specialized Criminal Court (SCC). The SCC continues to misuse counter-terrorism measures to target human rights defenders, activists, and peaceful dissidents. We urge government officials, legislators, celebrities, artists, and others to join us in speaking out against this sentence and calling for Mr. Al-Sadhan’s immediate and unconditional release. This sentence – on top of his three-year-long enforced disappearance, and allegations of torture and other ill-treatment, including sexual assault, while in custody – is shocking to the conscience.

Mr. Al-Sadhan has until May 5th to appeal this unjust ruling. If the sentence is upheld, Mr. Al-Sadhan will not be truly free, including the right under international law to travel to and from his own country, until he is 77 years old. His mother and sisters, U.S. citizens living in California, have not seen him or heard his voice in more than three years. This experience has been brutal not only to Mr. Al-Sadhan, but also to his family, who want nothing more than his safety and to be reunited with their loved one.

Mr. Al-Sadhan is a graduate of Notre Dame de Namur University in California. He returned to Saudi Arabia to work as a humanitarian aid worker for the Saudi Red Crescent. After an anonymous parody account allegedly belonging to him was targeted, plainclothes officers arbitrarily arrested him from the Saudi Red Crescent’s headquarters in Riyadh in March 2018 without providing a warrant or justification. Despite their repeated inquiries, Mr. Al-Sadhan’s family was not informed of his arrest or whereabouts for 23 months. Mr. Al-Sadhan was held without charge, denied his right to family visits and legal representation, and reportedly subject to torture and other ill-treatment, including sexual assault — all for allegedly using social media to criticize the Saudi Arabian government.

In February 2020, Mr. Al-Sadhan was for the first time permitted to make a one-minute phone call to his family in Riyadh, confirming his detention in Al-Ha’ir prison. The next call came one year later, in February of 2021, when he informed his family he had been told by Saudi officials that he would be released. However, instead of being released, he was put on trial before the controversial SCC, a counterterrorism court which has alarmingly been used to issue harsh sentences against peaceful
dissidents perceived as critical of the Saudi government. The charges against him are related to tweets from a popular parody Twitter account which used satire to criticize the Saudi government’s repression and religious establishment. Authorities violated Mr. Sadhan’s right to a fair trial, including denying him access to independent legal counsel of his own choice and subjecting him to two secret hearings without legal counsel, and allegedly extracted a confession through torture which the prosecution presented as evidence. The Court’s verdict is a clear violation of Mr. Al-Sadhan’s right to freedom of expression and sends a clear message to the public that peaceful criticism will be met with severe punishment.

Please join us in making the following calls:

1. Call for the immediate and unconditional release of Abdulrahman Al-Sadhan and all others detained for their peaceful dissent and human rights activism in Saudi Arabia.
2. Call on the Saudi authorities to accept the pending requests for country visits by nine United Nations Special Procedures mandate holders to investigate the alleged human rights violations committed in Saudi Arabia’s detention facilities.
3. Call on Saudi authorities to end the use of travel bans as punitive acts against individuals for simply exercising their human rights.
4. Call for the protection of fundamental human rights and freedoms, including freedom of expression, for all in Saudi Arabia.

Sincerely,

Areej Al-Sadhan (Sister of Abdulrahman Al-Sadhan)
Amnesty International
ALQST for Human Rights
Access Now
Center for Democracy and Human Rights in Saudi Arabia (CDHR)
CIVICUS
CODEPINK
Democracy for the Arab World Now (DAWN)
Freedom Forward
The Freedom Initiative
Grant Liberty
Human Rights Foundation
International Service for Human Rights (ISHR)
MENA Rights Group
PEN America
Project on Middle East Democracy (POMED)
Raise the Voices, a project of Civic Works
Saudi American Justice Project
Women’s March Global