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HUMAN RIGHTS REFORMS IN SAUDI ARABIA

Saudi Arabia's Realization of Ambitious Human Rights Reforms

Over the past five years, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has made more than 70 landmark human rights reforms. These reforms demonstrate Saudi Arabia's deep commitment to strengthening the principles of justice by laying down comprehensive safeguards for protecting the rights of its citizens and ensuring the country adheres to the highest human rights standards.

Under its Vision 2030 agenda for social, cultural, and economic transformation, Saudi Arabia continues to make significant strides in modernizing its legal, institutional, judicial, and regulatory environment. This progress is especially true in the human rights field. Saudi Arabia's human rights reforms are diverse, ranging from amending labor and civil laws that grant women the right to drive, travel independently and register as "head of households," to launching the "National Referral Mechanism" that aims to improve the national response for combatting human trafficking, and ending this egregious human rights violation once and for all.

Major Human Rights Announcements

On April 26, 2020, the Kingdom took a momentous step forward in its human rights agenda after announcing two significant human rights reforms: (1) the effective end of flogging as a form of criminal punishment, and (2) the abolition of the death penalty for individuals convicted of crimes committed while they were minors.

Together, these steps amount to a dramatic modernization of Saudi Arabia's penal system and build upon more than a dozen previous steps to codify the judicial system and ensure a more systematized approach to justice in the Kingdom.

Each reform was approved at the highest levels of Saudi Arabia's leadership, signifying that critical human rights reforms are essential to ensuring the country's development and improving the quality of life for all people in the country.

Details of the Elimination of the Death Penalty for Minors

- The Saudi Ministry of Interior and the Presidency of State Security will identify all death sentence judgements for persons who committed relevant crimes when they were under the age of 18.
- Individuals previously convicted will have their cases reviewed and re-sentenced according to the new guidelines.
- All sentencing will now be based on the guidelines outlined in Saudi Juvenile Law.
- The maximum sentence for any minor convicted of a crime will be 10 years.
- Individuals who have already served 10 or more years will be released upon review of their case.

Details of the End of Flogging as a Form of Criminal Punishment

The General Commission of the Supreme Court issued a directive requiring courts to end flogging as a form of Taazir. In Islamic law, Taazir refers to punishments left to the judge's discretion as it is not specified in the Quran or Hadith. Judges will now restrict their punishments to jail time, fines, or a combination of the two. These alternative forms of punishment are meant to help the perpetrator reform, which will ultimately benefit the greater Saudi society.