

In the Name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful

## **National Declaration for Reform**

### **Saudi Intellectuals Appeal to Saudi Government for Political Reform**

Rabie AlAwal 20<sup>th</sup>, 1432AH

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The consequences of the Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions are marked and caused critical political movements in many Arab states; among them is our country, Saudi Arabia. That made us all review our conditions, and seek extreme reforms before getting worse and face unpredictable developments. In 2003, elite of Saudi intellectuals had previously presented a document named "A Vision for the Nation's Present and Future" to the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, and that includes a set of certain proposals. He welcomed it and promised to look into it. Later on, a number of senior Saudi officials, also, announced that the Saudi government was determined for adopting wide-range reform policies in the state's system and in its relationship with the Saudi population. Now, a decade after those promises, only few reforms were applied, and we believe that the complications that were mentioned in the "Visions" document and other subsequent petitions have aggravated because of delaying political reform.

The contemporary situation is full of warnings and concerns. We and other Saudi citizens witness the retreat of the prominent regional role of Saudi Arabia, which was known for it, the weakening of the state system, the deterioration of the administration, the prevalence of corruption and favoritism, the dominance of bigotry, and the widening gap between the government and society; especially the youth. All of these would lead to disastrous consequences against the state and population, and that we, definitely, do not desire for our nation and children.

Addressing such situations require a serious review and an immediate announcement for the adoption of a comprehensive reform program by the state and society. Such program must focus on handling

vital defects in the Saudi political system, and leads for a firm constitutional monarchy system.

Population satisfaction is essential for the legitimacy of authority, the only the guarantee for unity, stability and effectiveness of the administration, and for protecting the state from foreign interference. This requires reformulating the relationship between the state and the society into a relationship in which population is an authority and a partner in policy-making through their elected representatives in the Shura Council. Moreover, the state should work for the interest of the society, enhance the standard of living, and guarantee dignity for citizens and the future of their children.

Therefore, we look for a royal announcement that declares the commitment of the state to turn into a constitutional monarchy, and set a timetable that specifies a date for the outset of desired reforms and the date of completing them. The announcement should, also, confirms the state's adoption for the major goals of reform; which are rule of law, full equality to all citizens, legal guarantee of individual and civil freedoms, balanced development, eradication of poverty and optimal use of public resources.

In this regard, we believe that the program of reforms includes the following items:

First, it is necessary to develop the main system of governing to an integral constitution to be as a social contract between the population and the state. This contract provides that the population is a source of authority, separates between the three authorities; executive, judicial and legislative, and limits and supervises the power of authorities. It, also, should include full equality to all citizens, legal guarantee of individual and civil freedoms, guarantee of justice and human rights, equality of opportunities to all, protection of peaceful freedom of expression, and promotion of public freedoms including the right of establishing political societies and professional organizations.

Second, it is important to emphasize the rule of law principle, ensure that all citizens; officials and commons, are equal under the law, and prohibit utilizing the state's resources for personal interest.

Third, it is significant to adopt public and direct elections in forming municipal councils, regional councils and the Shura Council, and let women participate in both; nomination an election.

Fourth, it is essential to adopt the principle of decentralized administration, and grant local administrative departments all the required authorities to interact with citizens demands in every region.

Fifth, it is necessary to emphasize the principle of an independent judiciary, and cancel all bodies that have parallel roles and do not refer to the judicial system. Courts should supervise investigations with defendants, prisoners' conditions and prosecution. All instructions and regulations that limit the independency an efficiency of judiciary, limit the immunity of judges or interfere in the power of judiciary shall be cancelled. Moreover, codifying and unifying regulations shall be accelerated, sentences and punishments should be limited, and international human rights conventions and treaties that were signed by the Saudi government shall be approved as part of judicial regulations. Criminal procedure law and pleading system must be activated and protected. All of these ensure justice, equality and implementation of provisions.

Sixth, it is vital to accelerate the issuance of civil societies system which was approved by the Shura Council, and to permit establishing all forms of civil society institutions as they are the channels for presenting public opinion and activating public participation in decision-making.

Seventh, despite the widening debate on the rights of Saudi women, the government did not take sufficient actions for fulfilling the requirement of this concerning matter. Neglecting women rights contributes in emphasizing the problem of poverty and violence, and weakens the family's contribution in promoting education. It is necessary to take legal and institutional measures that empower

women, and grant them their rights of education, ownership, employment, participation and public affairs without any discrimination.

Eighth, it is demanded to issue a law that prohibits discrimination between citizens for any reason, and that incriminates any practice of sectarian, tribal, regional or racial discrimination. The law, also, should incriminate hatred incitement for religious or other grounds. It is, also, required to set a national integration strategy that frankly recognizes and respects the existing cultural and social diversity in Saudi Arabia, and considers it a factor that promotes national unity and social peace. We need an effective national integration strategy that improves the conditions of marginalized, alienated and diminished groups, and compensates them for what they went through in the past.

Ninth, we had high expectations towards King Abdullah's decision of establishing Human Rights Commission and National Society for Human Rights; however, both Commission and Society turned into a bureaucratic department with a limited role in defending citizens' rights. One of the reasons for this retreat is the government's interference in appointing their members and refusal of many governmental departments to deal with them. Maintaining rights of citizens and residents and protecting them from abuse and humiliation must be on the top of the governments' and the society's priorities. Therefore, we demand eliminating all governmental restraints imposed on the Commission and Society, and legally guarantee their independency. We, also, call for the legislation of the right of forming other civil societies for defending human rights.

Tenth, there is no dignity without a decent living. Our country is blessed with many natural resources; however, many citizens suffer from poverty. Unemployment, and problems of housing and in the standard of living are notably marked; especially in rural areas and among retired people and elderly. We believe that it is not justified to fail in developing solutions for such problems. Not raising such issues for public discussion, besides neglecting the role of the private sector and civil society in processing those issues, and considering them

commercially only turned those problems into dilemmas and factors for humiliating citizens.

Eleventh, the past years revealed the extreme abuse and mismanagement of public money which requires the elected Shura Council to utilize its authority in control and accountability of all governmental departments. The Council shall have the power for establishing independent administrative departments that are able of performing their roles of control, and revealing administrative corruption and abuse of power in the governmental system. In the regard, we confirm the necessity of adopting the principle of transparency and accountability, and establishing an institution for ensuring these two principles through:

- a. Establishing a national commission for integrity that has independency, immunity in control and the ability of declaring investigation results to the public.
- b. Enabling citizens of sharing how public money is utilized by governmental departments, and eliminating all restraints that prevents the press from revealing the transactions suspected of being involved in corruption.

Twelfth, over the past five years, oil revenues had increased to high levels, and funded the government with a lot of money which must be utilized wisely instead of spending them on expensive projects with little use. Therefore, we call upon reconsidering the criteria of the Five-Year Development plan, and build a long-term overall development strategy that focuses on increasing national production, set the ground for alternative economic sources, providing jobs, and promoting the participation of the public sector in economic policy-making.

In conclusion, we confirm our appeal to both; the Saudi government and population, to adopt the proposed reform program. Government's sincerity and determination to reform can be trusted by all through immediately starting the implementation of the four following steps:

1. Issuing a royal announcement that confirms the government's intention of really considering the political reform program, and setting a timetable for beginning applying it.
2. Releasing political prisoners immediately, and bring who have proved to commit felonies to trial without delay besides providing each defendant the necessary legal guarantees.
3. Eliminating all the instructions of travel ban imposed against a large number of opinion makers.
4. Lifting restrictions on freedom of expression and press, enabling citizens of expressing their opinions publicly and peacefully, and ceasing the pursuit of peaceful opinion makers.

We draw the attention of the Saudi government and citizens that we confirms the solidarity of all; the population an government, in confronting the dangers facing our country, and preventing any unexpected events. We believe that we all learned from what happened in the neighboring Arab states. Addressing such challenges is only through a serious, immediate, overall reform that includes public participation in decision-making, enhance national cohesion and fulfill the population's expectation of a glorious nation.