



## [U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi Voices Deep Concern About the Saudi Arabian Regime's Torture of a Humanitarian Aid Worker](#)

Over this past weekend, U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) expressed serious concern with the Saudi Arabian regime's imprisonment and torture of aid worker Abdulrahman al-Sadhan. In a tweet, Pelosi highlighted that his arbitrary sentencing demonstrates Saudi authorities' blatant assault on freedom of expression in the country, and that Congress would continue to monitor the viable accusations of torture and human rights violations in al-Sadhan's case and others. Abdulrahman al-Sadhan was detained in Saudi Arabia back in March of 2018 and unjustly sentenced to 20 years in prison and a 20-year travel ban for allegedly running an anonymous social media account that criticized the Saudi royal family and government. Credible reports have emerged detailing al-Sadhan's torture and abuse at the hands of Saudi authorities, which includes beatings, electric shocks, and threats of being killed. Pelosi has referred to the case as a brutal and appalling injustice, and stated that she is deeply disturbed by the long record of human rights abuses committed by the Saudi regime. Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman has engaged in a sweeping crackdown to repress dissent, and al-Sadhan is one of scores of Saudi citizens that have been unlawfully detained as a part of these efforts.

The trial of al-Sadhan is one example of a long line of the Saudi regime, and particularly bin Salman's, attempts to harshly punish and deter dissent against the government. Just last month, Saudi authorities arrested several senior royals, academics, and activists. Additionally, Saudi Arabia has targeted political rivals and journalists, including the murder of Washington Post reporter Jamal Khashoggi. The killings and oppressive tactics have been widely condemned by human rights organizations, as they violate international law and human rights treaties. During the Trump administration, these atrocities were enabled. Former President Trump's dealings with the Saudi government seemingly allowed them to go even further with these human rights violations, as they were met with little resistance. This behavior was in fact taking place during the original arrest and trial of al-Sadhan back in early 2018.

The elements of al-Sadhan's case are particularly disturbing and egregious. The torture reported has included not only physical abuse, but psychological as well. Severe harassment, threats, and solitary confinement have all been imposed on the humanitarian aid worker. After the arbitrary arrest, al-Sadhan was held by authorities without contact to the outside world for nearly two years before he was allowed only one brief phone call to his family in February of 2020. His sister, who voiced appreciation for the attention that Speaker Pelosi continues to give to the case, has expressed worry about his condition under harsh and unjust detainment.

Rights activists hope that attention to this case and others like it will help spur a recalibration of the Biden administration's policies towards the Saudi regime, who for years have held a complex and special relationship with the United States. During his time in office so far, Biden has come out to condemn some top Saudi officials for their involvement in the Khashoggi murder. His administration has also halted support for the Saudi offensive's operations in Yemen, which aid groups and the United Nations have found is a major direct cause of the ongoing humanitarian crisis there. However, some critics have accused the administration of not taking a strong enough stance against the Saudi regime and its variety of human rights violations. With respect to cases of wrongful citizen imprisonment such as that of al-Sadhan though, U.S. government officials widely agree and appropriately point out that exercising basic freedoms of expression should never be deemed as a punishable criminal offense.