Mr. President,

Right Livelihood, ALQST for Human Rights and MENA Rights Group remain deeply concerned at the systematic practice of arbitrary detention of human rights defenders and peaceful dissidents in Saudi Arabia.

Among those who paid a high price for daring to promote democratic reforms are Right Livelihood Laureates Mohammed al-Qahtani and Waleed abu al-Khair, who are serving respectively 10 and 15 years in prison on activism-related charges, despite repeated calls from the Working Group for their release. While they were among the first to be sentenced under anti-terrorism legislation, this has become routine for the Saudi authorities, who are now worryingly increasing the length of sentences handed down to individuals exercising their freedom of expression. Over the last two months, academic Salma al-Shehab and Nourah al-Qahtani were sentenced to 34 and 45 years respectively due to tweets in support of human rights, in the case of al-Qahtani, on an anonymous account.

These lengthy sentences are spent in inhumane prison conditions and are followed by travel bans of the same length, in yet another attempt to silence and intimidate activists.

Mr. President,

As States restore normal diplomatic relations with Saudi Arabia, it is fundamental for them not to compromise on Human Rights. When international attention and pressure decreases on the Saudi authorities, repression mounts.

Hence, we reiterate our calls on the Council to urge Saudi Arabia to ratify the ICCPR, release all human rights defenders arbitrarily detained immediately and unconditionally, providing them with compensation and rehabilitation for the harm suffered.