Saudi Arabia at the “Vanguard” of the Struggle for Human Rights

There is very unusual and interesting news coming out of the far distant Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Local authorities have taken upon themselves to join the race in the observance of human rights in criticizing Norway's policies in this sphere. The Kingdom accused authorities in Norway that they were not enacting the necessary measures to protect the rights of the country’s Muslim citizens. In particular, during the session of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of the United Nations, an organization that regularly monitors the implementation of laws on human rights in 192 countries, Saudi Arabia has made a number of complaints against Norway. Representatives of the country demanded that Norway declare illegal any criticism of the Prophet Muhammad and of Islam, but also expressed concern about the “increase in cases of domestic violence, rape and the inequality social classes”. Furthermore, it was noted that Norway continues to record cases of religiously motivated crimes motivated by hatred towards Muslims.

At first, Norwegian authorities were just completely perplexed by such behavior and swagger coming from the Saudis. After all, we are talking about liberal and democratic Norway, and indeed the rest of Europe, who arrogantly preaches to others on the “norms” in observing human rights, promoting democracy, even with force if required. Even if earlier it was the European colonies in the Americas, Asia and Africa, now it is these very states that are trying to live by their own laws, but were destroyed in the interests of certain human rights by missile democracy of the West. It is sufficient just to look at countries such as Libya, Iraq, Afghanistan and Syria to understand the true meaning of the so-called Western democratic values.

The Norwegian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Børge Brende, at a meeting of the UN UPR also had to listen to reasonable criticism directed at his country from another 91 countries, mostly Muslim. However, Riyadh chose to send arrows of anger directed only against Norway, while at the same time wouldn’t it be justifiable to criticize other European countries? Apparently, the Saudis considered Norway to be the weakest link with the EU, but they, as it has occurred with them repeatedly, miscalculated.

Recovering ever so slightly from Saudi accusations, the Norwegians, thanks to their demagogy and rhetoric went on the offensive, “it’s a paradox that, a country, which doesn’t support fundamental human rights, has influence on offering advice”. (B. Brende - quoted by the news agency NTV, The Local)

As part of his argument he cited the previous report of the international non-governmental organization Humans Rights Watch, who noted that, in 2012 in Saudi Arabia arrests and trials of “peaceful dissidents” intensified. The report especially stressed that Saudi authorities are unable to protect the rights of nine million women in the country, as well as 9 million foreign workers. The authors of the study pointed out that thousands of people have been subjected to arbitrary detention and unfair trials.

After that, the human rights organization, Amnesty International accused Saudi authorities od failing to observe UN recommendations in the field of human rights and increasing repression in the country since 2009. “Previous promises of Saudi Arabia made to the UN were nothing more than hot air”, the Director of the Organization for the Middle East and North Africa, Philip Luther was quoted as saying in France-Presse. He also noted that the kingdom, based on its political and economic influence, wants to keep the international community from criticism of the situation on human rights in their own country.
In its report, “Saudi Arabia: unfulfilled promises” Amnesty International criticized “the continuing pressure on the opposition, including arbitrary arrests and detentions, unfair trials, torture and other types of abuses which have occurred over the past four years” in the kingdom. According to the organization Human Rights Defenders, since 2009 the level of repression in Saudi Arabia has risen; human rights activists and supporters of political reform in the country constantly face such manifestations of repression as arbitrary arrests, detention without trial, unfair trials and bans on travel.

Among those imprisoned for simply exercising their rights to freedom of speech and of peaceful assembly, are the founders of the Saudi Civil and Political Rights Association (ACPRA). Founded in 2009, the ACPRA has become one of the most famous independent organizations dealing with human rights in the country. Both founders of the ACPRA, 66 year old Dr. Abdullah bin Hamid bin Ali al-Hamid and 47 year old Mohammad bin Fahad bin Muflih al-Qahtani were both sentenced to 10 and 11 years in prison respectively. The court decided to dissolve the organization, confiscate its property and to close accounts in social networks. “These people are prisoners of conscience and should be released immediately and unconditionally.” Their peaceful struggle against human rights violations deserves reward, not punishment. The only ones who are guilty, this government”, said Philip Luther.

Torture and other forms of abuse during detention are widely used in Saudi Arabia with impunity. The most common methods of torture include, beatings with hands and batons, hanging from the ceiling or the door of a prison cell by your ankle or wrists, torture by electric discharge, prolonged periods of sleep deprivation and confinement to a cold cell. The unconditional trust the courts place in “confessions” which are often extracted through by means of torture or obtained under duress or by fraud, only reinforce this situation.

Several prisoners who managed to speak with Amnesty International, despite the opposition of the Saudi authorities, told representatives of the organization that they were tortured repeatedly for up to ten days in a row until they agreed to sign a “confession”. They also said that they were forced to stand for long periods with raised hands, beaten with electric wire on the face, back and stomach and threatened that they would be raped by other prisoners. Many of these human rights violations against human rights defenders, demonstrators, Shiite Muslims, men and women are committed under the pretext of security and counter-terrorism measures.

But even ordinary members of society are not free to express their views on the social networks, in so much as Saudi authorities have developed draft legislation to deal with forbidden information obtained via the computer and internet. A Leading Islamic authority, one of the seven members of the Supreme Council of Ulema of Saudi Arabia, Sheikh Abdullah al-Mutlaq said that any online correspondence between a man and a woman is a sin. As the TV channel Al Arabiya, the Sheikh expressed his view on one of the state run radio stations. According to al- Mutlaq, online correspondence between a man and a woman in social networks violates the covenant of Islam, according to which any unmarried couple may not be alone with one another in a private are. Related to this, the Sheikh urged women not to have on-line relationships with men, even if their only goal is to seek recommendations or advice. The words of al-Mutlaq were ambiguously met by internet users in Saudi Arabia. Some citizens supported the Sheikh, while others thought it extremely too radical. “Why not just ban women?” asked some of the most advanced internet users. Some of them jokingly asked whether a woman can get pregnant if she receives a message via the internet from a man.

How responsive would the most “democratic” country in the world, the United States, be to such violations? Most of the world’s politicians believe that Washington should end the silence of American authorities in connection with the policies pursued by Saudi Arabia in the field of human rights. Amnesty International urges U.S. President to take a strong position in relation to human rights issues in Saudi Arabia. “It is important that President Obama make clear to Saudi authorities that gross human rights violations and systematic discrimination are unacceptable. Without doing this, it would undermine the very principles for which the United States allegedly advocated” said Hassiba Hadj Sahraoui, Deputy Director of Amnesty International’s for the Middle East and North Africa. The U.S. has for too long shied away from any public policy objection to abuses of human rights in Saudi Arabia and for the most part turn a blind away at a growing wave of arbitrariness. President Obama has the opportunity to actually demonstrate that he will not sacrifice the principles of human rights, including the principles of equality and non-discrimination, for economic interests or for political expediency “- says international official.

And then she added the further truth, which actually captures the essence of “democratic” politicians in Washington: “Election criticism of human rights violations in some countries and the lack of attention to the same actions of others who are allies only serves to betray victims and weaken the international system of human rights”. In other words, it can be expressed as follows: “The United States knows that a number of specific rulers - dictators and murderers, but they are close to us, and so we will protect them”.

[Some other text]
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