Mr Kevin Ellis

Chairman and Senior Partner

PWC
1 Embankment Place
London
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UK

*22nd October 2020*

Dear Mr Ellis,

**Re: Amnesty International’s concerns on risks of business involvement in serious human rights abuses in Saudi Arabia**

I am writing to raise Amnesty International’s concerns on the human rights risks linked to business operations in and with Saudi Arabia ahead of the forthcoming B20 Summit under Saudi Arabia’s presidency. There are a number of salient human rights risks that business enterprises face when operating in Saudi Arabia and we would recommend that you undertake a proper due diligence process to prevent human rights harm.

For several years, the government of Saudi Arabia has been trying to improve its image, investing heavily in a public relations campaign to encourage foreign states and businesses to invest in the country. Saudi Arabia is seeking the involvement of international investors and business to help make Vision 2030 happen, with its expansive infrastructure development plans.

The multiple and persistent serious human rights violations documented in Saudi Arabia across a range of spheres increase the risks to companies operating there of becoming involved in serious human rights abuses. As set out in the [UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights,](https://www.ohchr.org/documents/publications/guidingprinciplesbusinesshr_en.pdf) business enterprises have a responsibility to respect human rights wherever they operate in the world.

Under Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, the government’s crackdown on free expression has deepened, with virtually all human rights defenders behind bars, on trial or in exile. Saudi Arabia still ranks as one of the top five executioners in the world and executes individuals who were under 18 at the time of their alleged offence. Torture and other ill-treatment is practised with impunity during arrest and in detention centres and prisons, including during incommunicado detention.

Systematic discrimination against women in law and practice continues. Migrant workers continue to face systemic discrimination, and those with irregular status face detention and deportation. Saudi Arabia’s Shi’a Muslim community in the Eastern Province face discrimination because of their faith, limiting their right to express religious beliefs and their access to justice, as well as their right to work and access to state services. The murder of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi in 2018 at the Saudi Arabian Consulate in Istanbul reflects how far the Saudi Arabian authorities are ready to go to in order [to muzzle critical voices.](https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2020/02/saudi-arabia-specialized-criminal-court-a-political-tool-to-muzzle-critical-voices/)

Amnesty International warns businesses and investors operating, or planning to operate, in Saudi Arabia, that they may be at risk of causing, contributing to or otherwise being linked to serious human rights abuses, as well as risking the safety of business associates in the country.

Depending on the nature of their business, these might include discrimination against women, the violation of migrant workers’ rights, unlawful surveillance and data gathering, forced evictions in connection to housing and development projects, as well as possible complicity in war crimes in the conflict in Yemen.

Businesses have an internationally recognized responsibility to respect human rights wherever they operate in the world. They are expected to carry out human rights due diligence in order to identify, prevent and mitigate the human rights-related risks of their activities and business relationships. The extent of due diligence that a company must conduct is determined by the likelihood and severity of the potential or actual impacts.

I am asking you to consider the human rights context of your company’s involvement in Saudi Arabia and to address the risks through a thorough human rights due diligence process. If you have any questions or would like further information, then please don’t hesitate to contact our Economic Relations Programme Director, Peter Frankental: email peter.frankental@amnesty.org.uk.

Yours sincerely,



Kate Allen

Director, Amnesty International UK