

sometimes deliberately denied to those in detention. We welcome President Medvedev's acknowledgement that detention conditions in some instances are inhumane, as well as recent proposals to reform the penal system, and urge the Russian government to follow through on these pledges.

Our SPF supports work on preventing torture within the penal system. This includes work with the Independent Council for Legal Expertise on raising awareness of the importance of complying with international human rights standards across the criminal justice system, with the aim of preventing torture, the trumping up of evidence, and false charges from being made by law enforcement agencies.

Racism and Xenophobia

Ethnic discrimination and anti-Semitism in the Russian Federation is still a major concern, particularly the level of xenophobic feeling and violent attacks on non-ethnic Russians. According to the Moscow Human Rights Bureau, in 2009, 218 xenophobia-related attacks

and conflicts were registered in Russia, resulting in the deaths of 75 people. This was a decrease in the number of attacks and deaths compared to 2008 (256 attacks and 113 deaths) although it is unclear whether this is due to a decrease in racist violence or a reluctance to report such incidents. It is likely that the violent attacks will continue, especially as nationalist groups seek to exploit increased xenophobia during the economic crisis.

We welcome the fact that the Russian government has acknowledged the problem of extremist attacks in Russia by drafting amendments to the Law on Extremist Activity. However, we remain concerned that these amendments still provide an opportunity to restrict political dissent and that they can be applied to protect public officials against criticism in a way that is contrary to international standards. We believe that there should be more proficient investigation of race-related crime as part of a comprehensive plan to combat racism.

Saudi Arabia



While there have been limited improvements in recent years, we remain deeply concerned about the human rights situation in Saudi Arabia, in particular over the use of the death

penalty, women's rights and the quality of judicial procedure. In 2009, we repeatedly made clear to the authorities our concerns at Ministerial, Ambassadorial and working level.

In addition to Saudi Arabia's Universal Periodic Review (UPR) in February 2009, the Foreign Secretary had a substantive discussion of human rights with the Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Saud al Faisal in April. During this meeting, the Foreign Secretary encouraged the Saudi government to implement the three recommendations made by the UK at the UPR – to end the system of guardianship of women; to set a legal age of majority to prevent the execution of juveniles; and to enact a law of association guaranteeing the right to form civil society organisations. In 2009, we repeatedly encouraged the Saudi government to be ambitious and proactive in taking forward these recommendations. However, progress towards achieving this goal remains slow.

Saudi Arabia received a total of 70 recommendations at its UPR. It rejected 17 outright on four issues: to lift its reservations on the Convention on the

UK Support for Tackling Corruption in Russia

A FCO-sponsored project on Anti-Corruption Analysis of Laws trained law-makers from across Russia to systematically evaluate draft legislation in order to identify and close loopholes, which could be exploited for corrupt practices. As work began, anti-corruption began rising up the Russian government's agenda and the Russian government sought our implementer's help to develop a new anti-corruption law. The Duma passed this law, which makes anti-corruption analysis of laws a compulsory part of the preparation of Russian legislation, in 2009. The ruling party and opposition politicians have recognised the law as significant – an opposition politician said that it was the most important piece of legislation passed in this session of the Duma. Mikhail Dmitriev, head of the economic think tank that advises President Medvedev, commented:

"Anti-corruption analysis of laws was a very successful project. Four years ago, corruption was a low-level concern. The government didn't know about anti-corruption analysis of laws. However, the anti-corruption analysis of laws has made a real breakthrough. To say now that a draft law has passed anti-corruption evaluation significantly increases the value of that piece of legislation."



The Foreign Secretary and Prince Saud al Faisal meet members of the Saudi-British Youth Forum in Riyadh in April

Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) (under which they only implement CEDAW to the extent that it is consistent with the government’s interpretation of Sharia law); to ratify the Optional Protocol to CEDAW; to ban all corporal and capital punishment; and to end the imposition of travel bans against people on the basis of their political or religious beliefs.

Although Saudi Arabia responded briefly to some of the questions raised by UN Members, it did not make any immediate commitments. Saudi Arabia gave its full response in June, accepting 50 of the 53 recommendations it had agreed to consider, while rejecting recommendations that it become party to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, reform legislation on religious freedom and take action on the issue of forced labour.

We continue work with the governmental Human Rights Commission as it seeks to implement these recommendations. We do not expect this process to have a transformative impact because many of the Saudi responses promised non-time limited reviews rather than immediate changes. However, the UPR has provided an opportunity for the international community to engage with Saudi Arabia across a range of human rights issues.

King Abdullah bin Abdel Aziz al-Saud has taken positive steps to promote a better understanding of human rights by highlighting their importance

with a countrywide initiative. This statement was well received by the media and, coming from the King, is an encouraging development. In April, the National Society for Human Rights, one of the two government-licensed human rights bodies in Saudi Arabia, published its second report. The report, which was much more ambitious and comprehensive than its predecessor, called for an elected parliament, the abolition of the guardianship system of women and enacting a law of association.

Our strategy remains to work with those in Saudi society who are advocating reform, in order to build indigenous and governmental support for the full application of human rights standards. However, the fact that many of our concerns relate to cultural practices, which are widely supported in Saudi Arabia, poses a significant challenge.

Conflict

In November, fighting broke out on Saudi Arabia’s southern border after a Yemeni tribal group, which has been involved in an intermittent conflict with the Yemeni government since 2004, attacked a Saudi border post and occupied positions inside Saudi Arabia. Saudi forces retook the occupied positions but clashes between Saudi forces and the rebels continued until the end of the year. Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International have both expressed concern over allegations of civilian casualties on both sides of the conflict. As a result of the ongoing fighting, tens of thousands of people have been displaced on both

sides of the border. Saudi authorities have pledged to rehouse Saudi citizens displaced by the conflict and the additional security measures.

Death Penalty

The death penalty retains significant public support in Saudi Arabia and there is little sign of any movement towards its abolition. There were 67 executions in 2009. This compares to 97 executions in 2008 and 157 in 2007. The death sentence continues to be applied for offences including homosexuality and "witchcraft". In May and November, the EU made representations to the Saudi government about the number of executions carried out in the Kingdom.

There is significant concern among many international observers that Saudi Arabia is one of the last five countries in the world to execute minors. We are aware of two executions this year where the individuals were under the age of 18 when they committed the crime. Both we and the EU made our concerns clear about these cases to the Saudi government. In September, the EU encouraged Saudi Arabia to withdraw its reservations to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and to establish 18 years of age as the legal age of adulthood in civil as well as in criminal matters.

In May, a convicted paedophile was executed and his corpse crucified in a public square in Riyadh. We and the EU expressed our serious concern to the Saudi government. A further execution and crucifixion was carried out in December.

In July, the King awarded the King Abd Al Aziz Medal First Class, the highest civilian honour in the Kingdom, to the family of a murdered man who pardoned his killer. The move was widely seen as an encouragement by the King to Saudi citizens to show mercy.

This, along with the increasing use of punishments such as community service in other cases, were small but positive steps in 2009, which may play a part in changing public attitudes to capital and corporal punishment.

Women's Rights

On 14 February, Dr Nora al Fayezi became the first woman to hold Ministerial rank in Saudi Arabia, in her new role as Deputy Education Minister for Girls' Affairs. New Ministers were also brought in at the Education, Health and Justice Ministries in a move

widely viewed as designed to speed up the pace of reform. But cultural and religious practices and the application of the government interpretation of Sharia law continue to prevent Saudi women from being equal citizens. Saudi Arabia ranks 130 out of 134 countries in the World Economic Forum's 2009 Global Gender Gap Index.

Women continue to come under the control of a male guardian. This system requires women to have the approval of their guardian to work or travel outside the Kingdom. In 2009, separate groups of Saudi women started campaigns both in opposition to, and in support of, the guardianship system. These campaigns demonstrated the significant obstacles to removing this system.

But society is slowly changing. Greater educational opportunities for women, including study in the UK, and economic pressures are forcing some women into work. The UK has supported these opportunities with several projects across the Kingdom, which provide support and assistance for women who wish to start or advance their careers, including:

- > the British Council-run Springboard programmes across Saudi Arabia, which equip women with essential business and marketing skills;
- > a project run by the Consulate General in Jeddah, which has helped give women more opportunities to start their own businesses; and
- > funding a pilot study with the Ministry of the Interior on developing a women's police force, building on the training and operational experience of the British police.

We also facilitated links between domestic violence charities in the UK and Saudi Arabia, funding seminars on case management and campaigning. In addition we visited and hosted delegations and provided training to improve the capacity of the Ministry of Social Affairs, the Ministry of the Interior and the Charity Commission to respond to domestic violence.

Frequent media coverage of successful Saudi female students at foreign universities has challenged local perceptions of women's roles. In 2009, a media debate took place about whether it was socially acceptable for Saudi women to work as maids. The fierce opposition to this move from men and women, both in the media and on the internet, demonstrated

the challenges facing those Saudi women who want to play a wider role in Saudi society.

The King Abdullah University of Science and Technology opened in September. It is the first coeducational institution in the Kingdom. The mixing of male and female students was controversial and drew criticism from some religious scholars. In September, the King dismissed one of these scholars from his official position. Although the King has shown willingness and taken positive steps to reform society, the situation regarding women's rights is still a serious cause for concern for the UK.

Religious Minorities

Islam is the official religion and all citizens are required to be Muslims. Renouncing belief in Islam is an offence punishable by death.

In the southern region of Najran, relations with the Ismaili religious minority improved in 2009 with the appointment of the King's son as the new governor. Prince Mishaal bin Abdullah has made a point of meeting Ismaili leaders and the King has released the last remaining prisoners convicted of rioting in 2001. But despite these positive developments, religious minorities continued to suffer discrimination and are under-represented in the senior government bureaucracy, municipal councils and public companies. Relations with the Shia community in the Eastern Province were contentious in 2009. Young Shias protested against the Gaza conflict in December 2008 and January 2009. In April, Shia pilgrims clashed with people they alleged were members of the religious police at the Baqi'a cemetery in Madinah. In May, an outspoken, if little followed, Shia cleric in the Eastern Province suggested that it might be in the interest of Saudi Shia to establish their own state in the Eastern Province. Throughout this period Shia leaders have alleged harassment and civil discrimination. The situation improved slightly in November when Shia leaders were quick to publicly support the government's actions against the Yemeni tribal group who attacked Saudi territory.

Freedom of Expression

Freedom of expression is very limited in Saudi Arabia. The internet is heavily censored. Newspapers, television and radio are government controlled and senior positions within media organisations are government appointments. As a result, Saudi media self-censors anything it considers too sensitive. The critical media response following the November

flooding in Jeddah was the first time organisations and local government officials had been accused of mismanagement and corruption. Some social networking sites carried graphic images of the destruction the floods caused. Again this was the first time that images showing such damage had been permitted by the Saudi government.

In September, the TV station LBC aired a programme where a Saudi man detailed his sexual encounters outside marriage. This led to a public outcry against both the man and the TV station. The female producer and other members of the production team were sentenced to lashing. In October, the King dismissed the sentence, but the controversy demonstrated the limits to freedom of expression in Saudi Arabia.

In June, Human Rights Watch and other international NGOs called on the Saudi government to drop charges against and release 67 men, most of them non-Saudi nationals, arrested for reportedly wearing women's clothing. The men were subsequently released.

The religious police (Muttawa) continue to enforce their standards of morality on the population. The

DNA Training in Saudi Arabia

The FCO has funded a project with the Ministry of the Interior in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to improve the capabilities of forensic investigators in analysing DNA samples, so that they can identify more efficiently those involved in terrorist activity. The use of DNA analysis reduces the need for confession-based evidence and provides rapid and valuable intelligence to identify those involved in terrorist activity.

Successful training programmes have taken place in the UK and the project achieved all its original aims and objectives – providing a technical training programme for new forensic graduate officers; empowering delegates with knowledge required to successfully interpret and evaluate complex DNA profiles; and providing Ministry of the Interior scientists and police officers with practical interpretative and evaluation experience. Senior analysts are expected to cascade advanced training, increasing the Saudi skills base nationally. The Saudi Ministry of the Interior has requested additional training, which will form part of a larger forensic training package to be funded by themselves.

new head of the religious police has tried to reduce incidents of abuse by his officers, but reports continue of the Muttawa taking advantage of their power.

Judicial Reform

Within the Saudi criminal justice system legal safeguards, such as guaranteed access to lawyers and evidence as well as public trials and juries, do not exist. Judges apply their own interpretation of Sharia law. There is no codified legal system, leading to wide variations in punishment for the same offence.

In 2009, the new Minister of Justice continued efforts to reform the Saudi legal system. Most of these efforts focused on administrative changes and have had little immediate impact in addressing international concern over the judicial process.

In June, the first sentences were handed down in 660 cases from the height of the terrorist campaign in 2003–5. The detainees had been held without trial for up to six years. Many prisoners arrested at the same time remain in prison. The trials themselves took place behind closed doors and like all trials in Saudi Arabia took place without a jury. Concerns were expressed about the quality of judicial procedures in these cases, with HRW and Amnesty International criticising many aspects of Saudi Arabia's counter-terrorism strategy. While we continue to push for open trials, we welcome the commencement of trials in these cases.

Somalia



Somalia has had no functioning government since its collapse in 1991. In late January, the Transitional Federal Parliament of Somalia elected Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed as the new

President of the Transitional Federal Government (TFG). He subsequently appointed a new cabinet of ministers. Despite significant international support and signs of political progress, implementation of the UN-led Djibouti Peace Agreement (August 2008) remains limited and Somalia's human rights situation remains very poor. The Djibouti Peace Agreement aims to ensure the cessation of all armed confrontation and a political settlement, promote peace and protect the population, and enable the unhindered delivery of humanitarian assistance.

The TFG has established a permanent presence in Mogadishu but continues to have little or no control over most of Somalia. Despite adopting a positive stance on human rights and acknowledging the need to integrate human rights into the work it undertakes, there has been no tangible implementation. The Somali people continue to face a dire humanitarian situation. Somaliland and Puntland in the north offer greater stability but reports of human rights abuses, albeit less severe, are commonplace.



An internally displaced Somali girl receives food aid at a camp in Mogadishu on 12 December