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# Saudi Arabia's use of force and demolitions in the Al-Masora neighborhood violates human rights

## Destruction of Al-Masora

24 May 2017

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GENEVA (24 May 2017) – The United Nations experts on cultural rights, adequate housing and extreme poverty today called on the Government of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to immediately halt the on-going demolition of a 400-year-old walled neighborhood in Awamia.

“Despite our attempt to raise concerns and seek explanation from the Government about the planned destruction, bulldozers and demolition vehicles, assisted by armed military forces, have reportedly started on 10 May to destroy buildings and homes in the walled historic neighborhood and in other areas of Awamia, causing injury, deaths and material losses to the civilians residents,” the group of UN experts said.

“Historic buildings have been irremediably burned down and damaged by the use of various weapons by the military, forcing residents out of their homes and of the neighborhood, fleeing for their lives,” noted the Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights, Karima Bennouna.

“These destructions erase the traces of this historic and lived cultural heritage and are clear violations of Saudi Arabia's obligations under international human rights law,” she stressed.

The UN Special Rapporteur on the right to adequate housing, Leilani Farha, also warned that what is occurring in Al-Masora constitutes a forced eviction under international human rights law. “Residents have been displaced. Many have been compelled to relocate to other cities and villages, some are living with relatives and many have lost their homes, their personal possessions and also their source of livelihood,” she said.

“Public and private institutions, such as schools, shops and health centers are paralyzed and the whole neighborhood seems to be under siege,” noted the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, Philip Alston, who also raised concerns about reported additional power cuts

Alston, who also raised concerns about reported additional power cuts since 18 May and the suspension of many services in large areas of the city.

The three human rights experts have been monitoring the situation since January 2017, when electricity cuts and other methods were used to pressure people out of the neighborhood without adequate resettlement and housing alternatives or compensations plans for their loss.

Last month, the UN experts sent an official communication to the Government raising concerns about the historical and cultural value of Al-Masora, the forced evictions of its residents and the impact of planned demolitions on the livelihood of the residents. See press release of 4 April 2017.. "So far, no answer has been received to our queries. The only reply has been these violent actions which have ignored our concerns," they said.

"We demand that the Saudi authorities immediately stop this demolition of cultural heritage and historic homes, and restore the human rights of their citizens, including by making adequate reparation and compensation," the UN experts concluded.

**Ms. Karima Benounne** (USA), Special Rapporteur in the field of **cultural rights**, **Ms. Leilani Farha** (Canada), Special Rapporteur **on adequate housing**, and **Mr. Philip Alston** (Australia), Special Rapporteur on **extreme poverty and human rights**; are part of what is known as the **Special Procedures** of the Human Rights Council. Special Procedures, the largest body of independent experts in the UN Human Rights system, is the general name of the Council's independent fact-finding and monitoring mechanisms. Special Procedures mandate-holders are independent human rights experts appointed by the Human Rights Council to address either specific country situations or thematic issues in all parts of the world. They are not UN staff and are independent from any government or organization. They serve in their individual capacity and do not receive a salary for their work.

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