

HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH

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November 29, 2021

Stefano Domenicali
President and CEO, Formula One Group

Chase Carey
Executive Chairman, Formula One Group

Jean Todt
President, Fédération Internationale de l'Automobile

Cc: Sasha Woodward-Hill
General Counsel, Fédération Internationale de l'Automobile

Dear Mr. Domenicali, Mr. Carey, and Mr. Todt,

We write to you requesting a meeting to discuss what steps, if any, Formula One has taken to comply with its [human rights policies](#) and the [United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights](#) ahead of the December 5, 2021 Grand Prix race in Saudi Arabia, and to request that, in line with these policies, Formula One make strong efforts to urge Saudi authorities to free unjustly detained peaceful Saudi activists.

Saudi Arabia's established history of using [international government-sponsored mega-events](#) such as the upcoming Formula One Grand Prix to [whitewash](#) its human rights record means that businesses have a [responsibility](#) under the UN Guiding Principles to mitigate their risk of contributing to human rights harms.

In particular, we think that one of the world's premier motorsports organizations should address the targeting of activists who advocated for women's right to drive. Today, dozens of women's rights and other peaceful activists are imprisoned, on trial, or effectively silenced and travel banned for their peaceful activism in Saudi Arabia. In the past year, Saudi authorities released prominent activists [Loujain al-Hathloul](#), [Nassima al-Sadah](#), [Samar Badawi](#), and [Nouf Abdelaziz](#), after unjustly detaining them for nearly three years on charges that define their human rights activities as [crimes](#).

The four women, alongside others also since released, had long campaigned for women's right to drive, a reform the Saudi government introduced just weeks after it embarked on [a large-scale coordinated crackdown](#) against the women's rights movement.

Though released, these brave activists remain under suspended sentences, travel banned and prohibited from pursuing their human rights work or speaking out about their detention.

Formula One's "[Human Rights Statement](#)" says it will "focus [its] efforts in relation to those areas which are within [its] own direct influence." We ask Formula One to follow through on its human rights commitments and urge Saudi authorities to *unconditionally* release these women's rights activists.

Further, Formula One should use its leverage to speak out about [all others who remain detained for peaceful activism](#). These are areas that fall within Formula One's direct influence.

Saudi Arabia's brutal crackdown on peaceful dissidents and activists Intensified [after Mohammed bin Salman was appointed Crown Prince](#). Despite recent social reforms, prison authorities continue to torture detainees and some of their families are subjected to broad collective punishment. As head of the country's Public Investment Fund, bin Salman's strategy to deflect attention from human rights includes investing millions of dollars to [host mega sporting events](#) like Formula One to burnish its image and obscure its dismal human rights record.

Formula One is in a unique position to either enable or endorse this human rights image-washing or it can press the Saudi Arabian government on its human rights record. Your flagship Grand Prix is an opportunity to step up to your commitments on human rights and speak out for victims of Saudi abuse.

To set up a meeting time to meet to discuss the above contents of this letter, please do not hesitate to reach us and our colleagues via email at your earliest convenience

Yours sincerely,

Minky Worden
Director of Global Initiatives
Human Rights Watch

Michael Page
Deputy Middle East Director
Human Rights Watch

