

Representative Ed Royce
Chairman
Committee on Foreign Affairs
2170 Rayburn House Office Building
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Representative Eliot Engel
Ranking Member
Committee on Foreign Affairs
2066 Rayburn House Office Building
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

September 20, 2018

Dear Chairman Royce and Ranking Member Engel:

We, the undersigned organizations, strongly encourage you to approve an important bipartisan piece of legislation that is currently before the House Foreign Affairs Committee: the Saudi Educational Transparency and Reform Act ([H.R. 4549](#)). We believe moving this bill sends an important signal that the United States cares about Saudi Arabia's commitments to its longstanding promises to reform its textbooks and specifically about the harmful content that children in Saudi Arabia's schools are being taught.

As you may know, this bill has already been [endorsed](#) by the bipartisan U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, which conducted a [review](#) this spring of twelve Saudi state textbooks from the 2017-2018 school year. According to [USCIRF's report](#), textbooks published by Saudi Arabia's government continue to contain passages that "extol jihad and violence against infidels," "urge believers to avoid befriending nonbelievers," teach that "Muslims who convert to another religion should be killed," assert that "homosexuals are to be stoned to death," and advocate "beating women when they disobey and stoning them to death if they have an affair."

Likewise, Human Rights Watch [examined](#) dozens of Saudi state textbooks from the 2016-2017 school year and found particularly pervasive incitement against Sufi and Shia Muslim religious practices in textbook passages that foster hatred and intolerance toward other Islamic traditions. Such incitement unfortunately remained in the curriculum this past school year as well.

The Anti-Defamation League (ADL) undertook an analysis and [found](#) a number of deeply disturbing passages in 2017-2018 Saudi state textbooks. Passages that caused concern characterized non-Muslim "infidels" such as Christians and Jews as the "enemies" of Allah and of Muslims, calling on Muslims to "abhor" such people. They also described non-Muslims as "combatants" who must be fought except under several extenuating circumstances. The ADL also reported finding current passages that declared that "Christianity in its current state is an invalid, perverted religion" and that claimed that Zionism seeks a "global Jewish government, to control the entire world" as well as "to destroy the Islamic creed."

The [Saudi Educational Transparency and Reform Act](#) is a judicious piece of legislation that would ensure that the American public and government officials have timely and comprehensive information about the progress Saudi Arabia is making on its [commitment](#) to educational reform.

This bill would require the State Department to submit annual reports to Congress within 90 days of the start of each school year on “all intolerant content” in Saudi state textbooks, as well as to require that these reports be made publicly available online.

In addition to identifying all such problematic passages, the Saudi Educational Transparency and Reform Act would require the State Department to monitor and report on the extent to which such textbooks are still [widely disseminated overseas](#), the extent to which the Saudi government seeks to retrieve and destroy old editions, and the state of Saudi efforts to revise teacher manuals and train teachers to promote tolerance. The Secretary of State would also be required to determine whether to issue an ongoing waiver to Saudi Arabia from penalties under the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 furthers religious freedom or U.S. interests.

Taking timely action on the Saudi Educational Transparency and Reform Act would send an important message about the House of Representatives’ intention to ensure that Saudi reforms include a shift away from the discriminatory and hateful language currently found in its public school textbooks.

Sincerely,

Americans for Democracy and Human Rights in Bahrain
Anti-Defamation League
Council on Global Equality
Human Rights First
Human Rights Watch
Project on Middle East Democracy