Petition
“In Defense of the Nation”
September 24, 2003
Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

In the name of God, the Most Merciful and Compassionate,

Your Royal Highness Crown Prince Abdullah Bin Abdul Aziz, Commander of the National Guard. May God protect him. Peace be upon you with God’s mercy and blessings.

On this dear occasion of the national day we are pleased to convey to Your Highness the most beautiful congratulations and benedictions, associated with the deepest meaning of loyalty and esteem, asking God to assist you in whatever you are undertaking for the progress and prosperity of the nation.

Your Royal Highness,

We are pleased to bring to your attention our position formulated in the attached petition entitled “In Defense of the Nation,” and in which the signatories express their condemnation of all aspects of violence and terror to which our country is being subjected. At the same time, the signatories emphasize the necessity to start implementing the process of a radical and comprehensive reform of all our constitutional, political, economic and social institutions. Such a reform is the practical and adequate answer to all the challenges we are facing now, and might face in the future.

May God protect you, and guide you towards all that is of good and progress for this dear nation of ours. Peace be upon you with God’s mercy and blessings.

Riyadh, 27 Rajab 1424 Hijra – 24 September 2003 AD

In the name of God, the Most Merciful and Compassionate,

“In Defense of the Nation”

Our country is witnessing increasing acts of violence by those who choose arms and bloodshed as a means of proving their existence, and impose their point of views instead of resorting to words and dialogue. This will result in costly damages to national security, social stability and civil peace.

In such difficult circumstances, when our country is facing the most difficult internal and external challenges, expressing rejection and condemnation of the symptoms of extremism and violence in all its forms becomes a national, political, moral and cultural necessity.
Based on our convictions that we -people and government- are partners in protecting the stability, security and unity of the nation, we are all called upon to bear our responsibilities and to revise the steps we have been taking, and to recognize that holding out on reform for too long, and not allowing popular participation in decision making, are among the main factors that have led our country to the dangerous turning point at which it now finds itself. For this reason, we believe that denying all political, intellectual, and cultural trends in our society their natural right to express their views has resulted in the dominance of one [religious] trend that is incapable, by virtue of its own tenets, of engaging in a dialogue with others. Because this particular religious trend represents neither the tolerance nor the diversity of Islam, it has led to the rise of a school of thought bent on terrorism, and on accusing others of disbelief. Our country is still suffering from this.

Countering terrorism cannot be realized through security means and solutions only, but also by diagnosing the political, economic, social and cultural factors behind it, and by immediately starting the implementation of the political and economic reforms, which have been expressed and developed in various forms of writings and speeches by many of those involved in the public affairs of our country. Among these was the petition entitled “Vision for the Present and Future of the Nation,” presented in January [2003] to the Crown Prince -may God protect him. In it a list of demands was made which included: setting up constitutional institutions of the state; allowing popular participation in decision making; turning the Majlis Ash-shura (Consultative Council) into an elected body, and enabling it to assume all the legislative and supervisory powers that go with this, implementing the principle of separation of powers, augmenting the independence of the judiciary, respecting human rights, legalizing the work of civil society organizations, and allowing for the evolution of religious, cultural and educational diversity that refuse unilateralism, takfir (excommunication), and all claims to the possession and monopoly of truth. Such a discourse would contribute to developing a pluralistic intellectual environment that helps to foster the values of a culture of tolerance and acceptance of the other, whoever he/she may be, and regardless of his/her national or religious affiliation.

These opinions and demands express the aspirations of different segments of the Saudi people, and constitute a vision common -overall- to both the political leadership and the different national constituencies.

We also believe that rooting out the symptoms of administrative corruption and the squandering of public wealth, diversifying the production base, implementing the principle of a just and equitable distribution of resources among all social classes and regions, suggesting practical solutions to the problems including those of poverty, unemployment, education, health and housing, and enabling women to perform their social and economic roles and other urgent issues cannot be addressed without implementing the aforementioned reforms.

At the same time as we declare our condemnation and rejection of all forms of extremist violence, symbolic and material, that seek to kidnap our society and to destroy the foundations and bases of the state, we ask those who participate in these acts and
encourage them to abandon all forms of extremism, violence and terror, in words and deeds, with the hope that such an initiative will be viewed positively by the authorities, and that extremists be dealt with in accordance with just laws and regulations. On the other hand, we also confirm our standing request for the political leadership to announce a long-awaited comprehensive national initiative to set up an autonomous national association, made up of all national constituencies representative of the diversity of the cultural, sectarian, and regional spectrums in our country, with the objectives of achieving the mechanisms likely to put into practice demands for constitutional, political, economic, and social reforms, and of moving from the stage of adopting the reform agenda to the stage of action and implementation according to an explicit schedule.

May God preserve our country, and guide it in the path of good.

*Translated by Nada Abdelnour and Khalid Al-Dakhil, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.*