

## Sympathy for the devil: we must not mourn King Abdullah

By [Ciarán Morrissey](#), Comment Editor (2015/16)  
Monday 26 January 2015



Image: xxxsnsxxx

In response to the death of King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia, the British Government ordered that flags be flown at half-mast in numerous locations, including Whitehall, Downing Street and Buckingham Palace. This move has been widely criticised, with many across the political spectrum seeing it as lip service to a brutal, repressive and anti-democratic leader; the Leader of the Scottish Conservative Party, Ruth Davison MSP, tweeted that the whole affair was “a steaming pile of nonsense”.

Nevertheless, it is understandable that the Government would wish to commemorate and pay tribute to the passing of possibly the most powerful man in the Middle East. King Abdullah – de facto ruler since 1996 – has been a great friend to the West, and has proved a powerful ally in the War on Terror. Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia has the largest share of the world’s oil reserves. The only country that comes close is Venezuela, which certainly isn’t a friend of the West. We only need to see the effects of plummeting oil prices in our own country (not to mention what it’s doing in Russia) to see that Abdullah’s influence was global.

But we should not mistake political usefulness for personal praise. However skilled Abdullah was when it came to international relations, inside Saudi Arabia he ruled with an iron fist.

The country has an atrocious record on basic human rights, so much so that blasphemy is a capital offence. Recently, the founder of a blog advocating free speech was sentenced to 1,000 lashes and 10

years in prison. Religious freedom is non-existent. All children of Muslim fathers are considered Muslim by law, and to convert to another religion is to risk execution or lengthy imprisonment. The state religion of Salafi or Wahhabi Sunni Islam is an extremely fundamentalist form of religious belief that leaves no room for religious freedom or diversity. Public execution by beheading is still the norm, and may be carried out for a variety of offences, from murder and rape to the aforementioned blasphemy and apostasy. In addition to beheading, stoning remains a popular form of execution, especially for adultery. Women, in particular, have almost nothing in the way of human rights in the Kingdom. Marital rape remains fully legal, women are forbidden to go out in public without a male chaperone, and nor are they allowed to drive.

Women have only recently gained the right to vote, but sadly this seems a token gesture as the King holds absolute authority, and anyone else holding executive office does so at the King's pleasure. Saudi Arabia's highest elected officials are the equivalent of local councillors, and these elections are far from regular. Held in 2005, they were planned for 2009, but delayed in 2011. King Abdullah did grant women the right to vote in 2011, though their first opportunity to do so will be this year and it remains to be seen whether King Salman will honour this arrangement.

In honouring the late King, we legitimise his rule. We say it was okay; he was a friend of the West, and we should overlook his legacy. That legacy is one of brutal religious and political repression, and of some of the most hard-line and institutionalised misogyny in the world. It is never right to be glad that someone has died, but there is no reason to mourn Abdullah's passing. When the flag of the United Kingdom is lowered to honour a man who consistently denied his people their most basic human rights, it degrades all of us as British citizens.



Most Read Discussed

1. [CLASH OF COMMENTS: Should those responsible for the Grenfell effigy bonfire be prosecuted?](#)
2. [The breakup beard](#)
3. [World AIDS day - how you can help wipe AIDS out](#)
4. [First, go fix your bad service](#)
5. [The world of Yorfess: An Ode to Shitposting](#)
6. [York needs to join the fossil fuel divestment wave](#)

### Write for Nouse Comment

[Get in touch with the editors](#)

[Join the Facebook group](#)

### More in Comment

[World AIDS day - how you can help wipe AIDS out](#)

[Why the #MeToo Campaign Must Include Men Too](#)

[CLASH OF COMMENTS: Should those responsible for the Grenfell effigy bonfire be prosecuted?](#)

[Indifference to JCRs evident](#)

[Slurring champagne socialists is unfair](#)

Don't dismiss the white poppy: it serves an important purpose

[About Nouse](#)  
[Who's Nouse](#)  
[Website Credits](#)  
[Contact Us](#)  
[Advertising](#)  
[Archives](#)  
[Student Discounts](#)  
[Print Editions](#)  
[Mini-Sites](#)  
[Nouse on Twitter](#)  
[Nouse on Facebook](#)  
[Nouse on Google+](#)

© 1964–2018 Nouse

[Policies](#) |

