

U.K. High Court Action over Selling Legal Services to Aid Saudi Beheaders and Torturers

The Michael Gove Case

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Image: Michael Gove: Facing a High Court challenge over selling services to the Saudis

Tomorrow the High Court will receive an application from the Gulf Centre for Human Rights to bring a judicial review over the Justice Secretary's decision to bid for commercial work from the Saudi Arabian government because of the regime's appalling record of public beheadings, torturing dissidents and flogging bloggers like Raif Badawi.

The case against Michael Gove is a legacy from his predecessor Chris Grayling but is linked to an appalling case of torture against a Saudi Arabian -simply known for his own protection as AB.

The [Gulf Center](#), a non governmental organisation based in Beirut and Copenhagen, defends independent journalists, lawyers and bloggers in the Middle East, is applying to take over the case started by AB after it appears the Ministry of Justice retrospectively removed legal aid from him.

Central to the case is the shadowy and secretive (we know this as it vigorously finds any way not to release information) Just Solutions International, a commercial arm of the Ministry of Justice set up by Chris Grayling. As readers of this blog and those who follow the excellent [Jack of Kent](#) aka lawyer David Allen Green will know - Just Solutions has provided services to Saudi Arabia and has a £5.9m bid for Saudi work at the moment.

The centre's lawyers want leave from the court to challenge whether the organisation has complied with official Whitehall guidelines before bidding for the contract and also whether Michael Gove or his predecessors has acted illegally by creating this commercial organisation without any Parliamentary approval.

Their case cites information from government documents on this blog and Jack of Kent's blog. We have been separately pursuing the ministry over related issues. What they have found out is that there are no public documents saying that it followed the coalition's Overseas Judicial and Security Assistance guidelines.

These restrict all government departments from bidding for work from regimes which breach human rights if the Government's reputation is damaged or is a serious risk to aiding or significantly increasing human rights abuses. These are spelled out as regimes that unlawfully detain people, have the death penalty, torture people and limit freedom of expression. Saudi Arabia ticks nearly every warning box.



Baroness Anelay: Saudi people want floggings

Until now the standard response has been that this help is meant to help improve standards. that is until a comment from foreign office minister Baroness Anelay in reference to the flogging of Raif Badawi in the [Lords](#): ““My Lords, I think we have to recognise that the actions of the Saudi government in these respects have the support of the vast majority of the Saudi population.”

Melanie Gingell, a member of GCHR’s advisory board, said::

“It seems to us that far from improving human rights standards in the detention systems of these regimes, the UK is more likely to be simply improving the efficiency of the systems within which these notorious abuses are being carried out. The British public has been horrified by the public beheadings and floggings carried out in Saudi Arabia, and now mirrored by ISIS, and they have a right to know exactly what role the UK government is playing in these systems.”

She added,

“We fear that the driving motivation behind these bids is purely commercial, and the veil of secrecy that has been drawn over them simply serves to deepen our concerns that the UK is making money out of the worst aspects of these regimes, that it condemns in public, but is happy to give support to in private.”

Deighton Pierce Glynn Solicitors (DPG) are acting for GCHR. Adam Hundt, a partner at DPG, stated: “It is surprising that JSi’s activities have taken place shrouded in secrecy, and without parliamentary debate or approval. If the UK is to sell its public services to regimes that behead people for sorcery, stone women to death and flog people for expressing pro-democracy views, then one would expect our Parliament to be consulted and given the opportunity to impose appropriate parameters on such activities.”

A campaign to crowd fund this action has also been launched by the Gulf Centre for Human Rights. The link is <http://www.gofundme.com/saudiprisons>

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