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UN executions expert to visit Turkey to lead Khashoggi inquiry

Investigation comes as Saudi efforts to normalise relations with west move on to Davos

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A UN expert on executions is to travel to Turkey next week to lead an “independent international inquiry” into the death of Jamal Khashoggi, the Saudi Arabian journalist killed in the Saudi consulate in Istanbul in October.

Agnes Callamard, the special rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, said she would evaluate the circumstances of the crime and “the nature and the extent of states’ and individuals’ responsibilities for the killing”. She will report on the findings from her five-day visit to the UN human rights council in June.

In an email to Reuters, Callamard said the inquiry was being conducted at her request and that she would be accompanied by three experts, who have forensic expertise among other skills. She declined to name the experts for now.

Earlier on Thursday, the Turkish foreign minister, Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, said it was time for an international investigation and that the Turkish president, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, had ordered preparations to be made.

The development came as western businesses moved towards normalising relations with Saudi Arabia at the World Economic Forum in Davos. Riyadh has sent a large-scale ministerial delegation, which has expressed sorrow at Khashoggi’s death while at the Swiss resort.

Patrick Pouyanne, the chief executive of the French oil company Total, and James Gorman, the chief executive of the US investment bank Morgan Stanley, spoke alongside the Saudi finance and economy ministers at a panel at the Swiss ski resort.

Gorman said the murder of Khashoggi was unacceptable but added: “What is the alternative for a company like Total? To boycott Saudi Arabia? We are always against sanctions and boycotts. Who suffers from boycott and sanctions? It’s the normal people, the people on the street.”

Ueli Maurer, the president of Switzerland, said his country had moved on and wanted to build strong relations with Saudi Arabia, a rich, oil-producing kingdom, and major global investor. “We have long since dealt with the Khashoggi case... We have agreed to continue the financial dialogue and normalise relations again,” Maurer said.

Saudi ministers expressed pleasure at the return of business interest in the kingdom. Its finance minister, Mohammed al-Jadaan, said it was “absolutely sad, what happened to Jamal Khashoggi”, but added the fact that a \$7.5bn (£3.4bn) Saudi bond was heavily oversubscribed earlier this month showed investors were regaining confidence.

The CIA has concluded that Khashoggi’s murder was probably ordered by the powerful Saudi crown prince, Mohammed bin Salman, and his death has left the US scrambling to provide cover for the kingdom, relations with which have been a bedrock of American foreign policy under Donald Trump.

The Saudi effort to normalise relations with the west is facing pushback in Turkey, the UN and in British political circles.

Çavuşoğlu claimed on Monday that some western countries were trying to cover up the Khashoggi murder, and said the route to justice may lie through a UN-led international investigation.

Saudi Arabia has refused to cooperate with Turkey, and is conducting its own judicial proceedings against 12 suspects. The case is not held in public so the evidence and defence being mounted is not known.

In the UK, one of Saudi regime’s strongest sympathisers in parliament urged the Riyadh to signal its commitment to reform by allowing a British panel of MPs to visit Saudi Arabia to investigate allegations that women’s rights activists were being tortured and sexually harassed in detention.

Crispin Blunt - who lost the chairmanship of the Commons foreign affairs select committee partly because of his support for UK arms sales to Saudi Arabia - has so far been stonewalled by Riyadh in his efforts to access the eight detained activists. The women were arrested between May and July and then branded traitors in the Saudi press.

Blunt, a Conservative MP, has written both to the Saudi ambassador in London and to the new foreign minister, Ibrahim al-Assaf, for permission to travel to Saudi Arabia, but has not yet been given any reply.

Speaking at a briefing in London, Blunt said the panel would publish its own findings on the allegations of torture if the Saudis did not cooperate by the end of the month.

Human Rights Watch claims there have been credible reports from members of the women’s family that they have also been denied medical access, as well as being maltreated.

Blunt said: “These women are celebrities of the international women’s movement so there is an enormous global focus on what is happening to them. There is a clear opportunity for Saudi Arabia to send a signal that things have changed and they could amplify that by engaging with our panel.”

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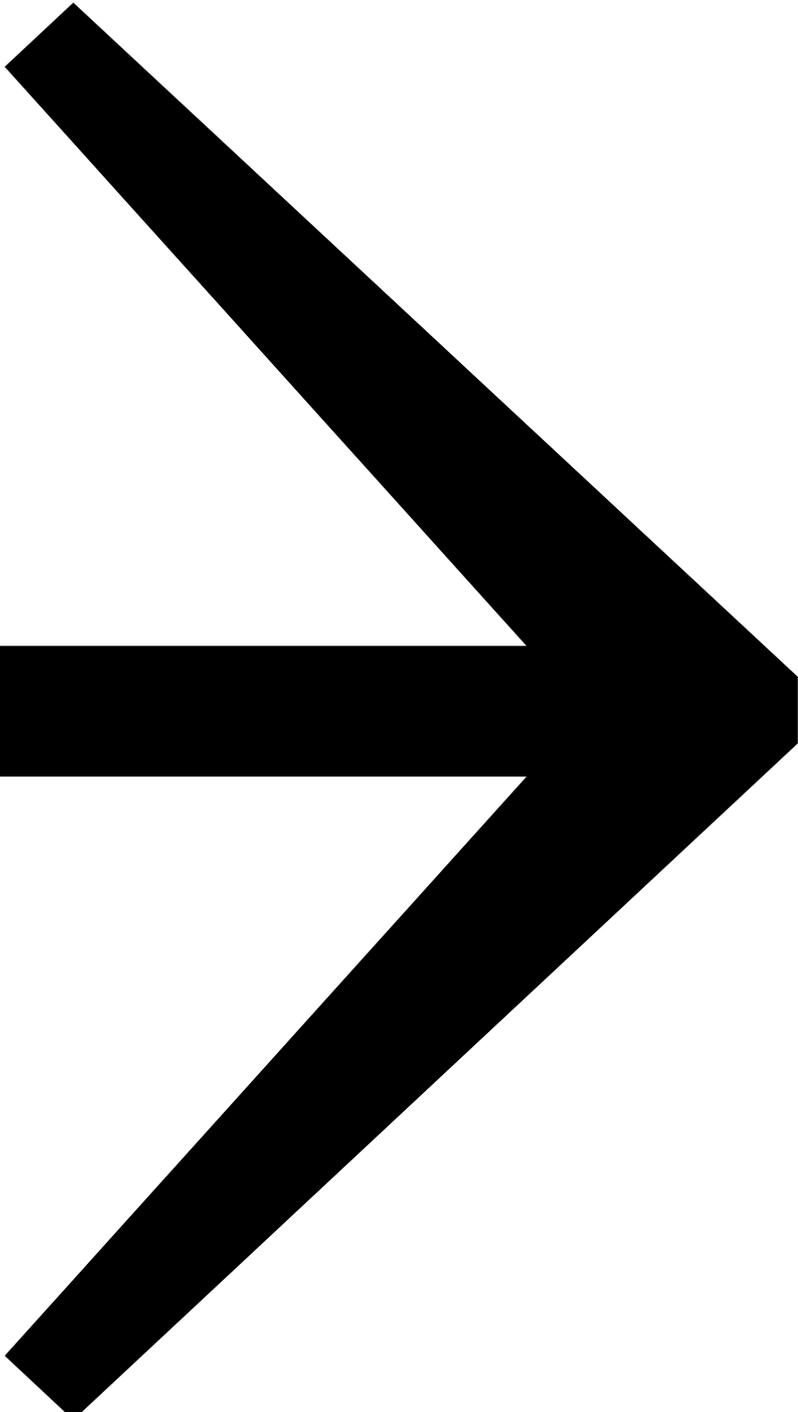
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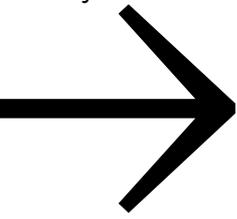
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