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## Saudi demonstrators condemn violent regime crackdown on protests

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Saudi demonstrators have taken to the streets to condemn the violent crackdown on anti-regime rallies and the shooting of a human rights activist in the oil-rich Eastern Province.

A large number of people staged demonstrations in the villages of Qadih and Bihari on Friday to express solidarity with anti-government protesters killed by al-Saud forces.

They also chanted slogans against the ruling Al-Saud family and called for its downfall.

The protest rallies come a day after Saudi regime forces shot human rights activist Mohammed Saleh al-Zenadi near his home in the village of Awamiyah, located 389 kilometers (241 miles) northeast of the capital, Riyadh.

According to activists, the injuries Zenadi sustained on Thursday from the live rounds fired by the Saudi forces put him in a critical condition. He was rushed to a nearby hospital to receive medical treatment.

Regime forces have reportedly besieged all hospitals in Awamiyah as they are searching for Zenadi to have him arrested for taking part in anti-government demonstrations. Another 22 activists are also wanted by authorities.

Saudi Arabia's east has been the scene of anti-government protests since February 2011, with demonstrators demanding human rights reform, freedom of expression and the release of political prisoners.

Several demonstrators have been killed and dozens of activists have been arrested since the beginning of the protests in the region.

Riyadh has intensified its crackdown on anti-government protesters since the beginning of 2012.

The US-based Human Rights Watch called on Saudi authorities last October to stop the "arbitrary arrests of peaceful protesters, relatives of wanted persons, and human rights activists" in Eastern Province.

According to the Saudi-based Human Rights First Society (HRFS), the detainees, held in Saudi custody, suffer both physical and mental torture.

The arrests in Saudi Arabia have been carried out despite the fact that the authoritarian kingdom is a party to the Arab Charter on Human Rights, Article 14 of which prohibits arbitrary detention.

Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have accused the Al Saud regime of silencing dissent through intimidation and the violation of the basic rights of citizens.