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New NSHR Members to Help Defend Gitmo Detainees

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JEDDAH—The executive council of the National Society for Human Rights (NSHR) has approved the names of the society's first batch of volunteer members, according to NSHR President Bandar Al-Hajjar.

The NSHR chief said that the new volunteer members include four lawyers who are participating in the defense of detainees held by US forces in the offshore prison in Guantanamo, Cuba.

"We need their experience in this case to support the society's new committee that aims to defend the Guantanamo prisoners soon," he said.

The 40-person permanent council selected the 35 new members out of a pool of 120 nominees from different professional and religious groups from around the Kingdom, he said.

The nominees that weren't elected will have the opportunity to participate in future NSHR activities once the organization is expanded, said Al-Hajjar.

Al-Hajjar said that there are currently four branches of the NSHR in the Kingdom: In Jeddah, Riyadh, Dammam and Jizan.

"We are hoping to expand to serve as many people as possible around the Kingdom according to the laws and regulations," he said.

He said that the new membership also includes a number of lawyers who are offering pro-bono human rights defense work for people in need.

He stressed the importance of increasing the role of the NSHR and its branches, and also spreading the awareness among people about human rights in all of its aspects.

Engineer Jafar Al-Shayeb, one of the new volunteering members from the Eastern Province, said the society is still in its infancy and needs help and experience to expand its duty in the community.

He said that he would provide his help by locating, receiving and studying the complaints that the organization receives from victims.

"Basically it's too early to have a clear picture of my role in the society. We will first have a meeting in order to create clear strategies so that every new member will give his best according to his own profession," said Al-Shayeb.

Talal Kusti, one of the new volunteers from Jeddah, said that he would contribute through the media in spreading awareness about various issues concerning human rights.

"As volunteer members, our role will be mostly to create awareness and educate people," he said.

"We have to listen to people and guide them to ensure their rights are fully protected."