



Bahrain: Joint Letter on Human Rights Situation to Member and Observer States of the United Nations Human Rights Council

Re: Upcoming 56th Session of the Human Rights Council

30 May 2024

Your Excellencies,

Ahead of and during the upcoming 56th Session of the Human Rights Council, we urge you and your delegation to raise concerns over the human rights situation in Bahrain, particularly regarding the continued arbitrary detention of human rights defenders and opposition leaders in Bahrain, many of whom have been wrongfully imprisoned since 2011.

Thirteen years since Bahrain’s popular uprising, systemic injustice has intensified and political repression targeting dissidents, human rights defenders, clerics and independent civil society has effectively shut any space for the peaceful exercise of the right to freedom of expression or peaceful activism in the country. Despite a series of legal reforms and the creation of new national human rights institutions, based on [recommendations](#) of the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry, an independent panel commissioned by the King in response to international concern over the suppression of the 2011 protests, most of these measures have had little impact in practice.

The recent [royal pardon](#) issued by King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa on 8 April 2024, on the occasion of Eid Al-Fitr and the King’s Silver Jubilee, was a significant move. The pardon included the release of more than 650 political prisoners, marking a change in state policy from previous royal pardons, according to [research](#) conducted by the Bahrain Institute for Rights and Democracy. While the gesture is notable, Bahrain authorities must cease unjustly prosecuting their critics in the first place.

We also express concern that this pardon excluded many who played significant roles in the 2011 pro-democracy uprising, with an estimated 550 political prisoners remaining behind bars.

As Eid al-Adha approaches on 16 June 2024, and ahead of HRC56, we see a critical window of opportunity to advocate for further releases. We request that your governments continue to monitor the situation in Bahrain and raise concerns with Bahraini authorities at the highest level, publicly and privately. We further call on you to demand the immediate and unconditional release of all individuals imprisoned for their political beliefs and the retrial of those convicted and sentenced to death following unfair trials in full compliance with international fair trial standards.

Cases of Concern

We bring to your attention specific cases of individuals who remain unjustly imprisoned in Bahrain, in violation of their human rights and despite widespread international condemnation.

- [Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja](#), a Bahraini-Danish human rights defender, has been [arbitrarily](#) detained since 2011 for his role in peaceful demonstrations. Bahraini authorities have subjected Al-Khawaja to severe physical, sexual, and psychological torture, and his health has deteriorated significantly during his prolonged imprisonment.
- [Abduljalil Al-Singace](#), an award-winning human rights defender and [blogger](#), remains [arbitrarily detained](#) since 2011 after being sentenced to life in prison on charges of “plotting to overthrow the government”. He is now approaching three years since he began a solid-food hunger strike after authorities confiscated his research manuscripts, sustaining himself only on multivitamin liquid supplements, tea with milk and sugar, water, and salts. Despite his disability and hunger strike, he continues to be denied adequate medical care.
- Hassan Mushaima, an opposition leader aged 76, is serving a life sentence solely for exercising his right to freedom of association and expression. Over the past few months, his health has deteriorated. He continues to be denied access to adequate healthcare and remains [arbitrarily detained](#). Since they were transferred to Kanoo Medical Center in 2021, Al-Singace and Mushaima have been held in prolonged solitary confinement and denied access to sunlight.
- Sheikh Ali Salman, the leader of dissolved opposition party Al-Wefaq, was convicted and sentenced to life imprisonment in 2018 on politically motivated charges related to espionage. He has been imprisoned since 2014 on a separate conviction related to speeches he delivered in 2014 against parliamentary elections that his party boycotted. Amnesty International [declared](#) him a prisoner of conscience and called his conviction “a travesty of justice.”

Over a decade ago, the Human Rights Council issued a statement of concern “about guarantees of due process in the trials of 13 political activists who had their sentences, including life sentences, upheld in January 2013.” We note that of the “13 political activists” referenced, ten remain arbitrarily detained, including some of those listed above.

In 2023, the Committee to Protect Journalists documented the imprisonment of journalists, including [Ali Mearaj](#) and [Hassan Qambar](#), who were excluded from the recent releases.

Additionally, twenty-six individuals in Bahrain remain on death row at risk of imminent execution, many of whom allege torture and unfair trials. [Mohammed Ramadhan and Husain Moosa](#), who have now spent over a decade [unlawfully detained](#), were sentenced to death in an unfair trial marred by torture allegations.

Conclusions and Recommendations

In light of the above, we respectfully urge your delegation to take a proactive stance in the lead-up to Eid al-Adha and during the upcoming session and:

- Call on Bahrain to immediately and unconditionally release all individuals imprisoned solely for exercising their human rights.
- Address these developments in your national capacity and jointly with other states, including during the Interactive Dialogues with the Special Rapporteurs and Independent Expert on health, freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association, independence of judges and lawyers and international solidarity.

- Issue a statement raising concern about individual cases of human rights defenders and opposition leaders who continue to be arbitrarily detained in Bahrain in violation of international law.

With assurances of our highest consideration.

Sincerely,

1. Access Now
2. ALQST
3. Americans for Democracy & Human Rights in Bahrain (ADHRB)
4. Amnesty International
5. Article 19
6. Bahrain Centre for Human Rights (BCHR)
7. Bahrain Institute for Rights and Democracy (BIRD)
8. Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (CIHRS)
9. DAWN
10. English PEN
11. European Centre for Democracy and Human Rights (ECDHR)
12. Fair Square
13. Femena
14. Freedom House
15. Gulf Centre for Human Rights (GCHR)
16. Human Rights First
17. Human Rights Sentinel
18. Human Rights Watch
19. IFEX
20. Index on Censorship
21. International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH)
22. International Service for Human Rights (ISHR)
23. MENA Rights Group
24. No Peace Without Justice
25. PEN America
26. PEN International
27. Rafto
28. Redress
29. Scholars at Risk
30. The #FreeAlKhawaja Campaign
31. The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ)
32. World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT)