



Joint appeal to the UN against ill-treatment and torture of detained human rights defenders, activists and photojournalist in Bahrain

UN Special Rapporteur on Torture Juan Mendez (sr-torture@ohchr.org)

and

UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders Margaret Sekaggya (defenders@ohchr.org)

and UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression Frank La Rue (freedex@ohchr.org)

OHCHR-UNOG

8-14 Avenue de la Paix

1211 Geneva 10 Switzerland

fax: +41 22 917 90 06, e-mail: urgent-action@ohchr.org

CC. International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)

19 Avenue de la paix CH 1202 Geneva

Fax: +41 22 733 20 57, webmaster@icrc.org

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Dear Special Rapporteurs Mendez, Sekaggya and La Rue,

We the undersigned NGOs worldwide are writing to express serious concern over the treatment of Bahrain human rights defenders whom we believe to be detained in violation of their right to freedom of expression and freedom of assembly. We have received alarming reports of torture and ill-treatment in prison, which contravene Bahrain's obligations under international law, as well as its promises to stop the practise of torture in detention.

Most recently, Nabeel Rajab, President of the Bahrain Centre for Human Rights (BCHR) and Secretary General of the Gulf Centre for Human Rights (GCHR), was threatened in Jaw prison after he told his wife Sumaya on 14 May 2013 that he had witnessed young political prisoners being tortured by prison guards and called for the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to visit. After two days with no news, Rajab called his wife and colleague to say, "I

witnessed by my own eyes a big crime and the government doesn't want me to talk about it," and then the phone was cut off.

Rajab's wife was able to visit him on 20 May where he told her that while walking in the prisoners' exercising yard, he and two other prisoners "heard voices of punching and beating coming out from the prison administration building." Nabeel said he "rushed to the exposed area of the building and saw 7 to 8 young (15 to 18 years old) prisoners who were handcuffed facing the wall, and several foreign non-Bahraini police men were beating them, hitting them with the wall and hitting their heads together. The kids were bleeding heavily." Rajab believes these prisoners have been prevented from seeing their families, and he and the other two witnesses have been threatened to remain silent. Rajab, who is in jail for two years on charges of calling for and peacefully participating in gatherings arbitrarily designated as illegal, [has previously been ill-treated](#) in prison and denied medical attention.

We are deeply concerned by repeated reports of torture in detention in Bahrain. [Human rights defender Naji Fateel](#), a Board member of the Bahrain Youth Society for Human Rights (BYSHR), was allegedly tortured in the notorious Criminal Investigations Directorate (CID) after his arrest on 2 May. He was charged on 9 May with alleged "establishment of a group in order to disable the provisions of the Constitution" and ordered to be imprisoned for 60 days, then sentenced on 22 May to six months in prison on charges of participating in "illegal gatherings." Among the allegations are that he has been subjected to electrical shocks to his genitals, foot, and back, and been subjected to simulated drowning, severe beatings, threats to publish photographs of his wife, hanging by his hands from the ceiling, threats to rape him, standing for long hours, and sleep deprivation.

Also on 9 May, the Appeal Court upheld the three-month prison sentence of activist Zainab Al-Khawaja on charges of participating in an "illegal gathering" in November 2011. Al-Khawaja's new sentence will be added to the one she is currently serving of over three months for "insulting an officer" in a military hospital in Issa Town Prison for women. She is denied family visits for refusing to wear the prison uniform, like her father, human rights defender Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja, jailed for life for his role in protests in the peaceful demonstrations of early 2011.

Zainab Al-Khawaja and activist Ma'suma Sayyid Sharaf were then sentenced on 22 May on charges of "illegal gathering", "inciting hatred against the regime" and a further charge related to the alleged assault of police officers during [their arrest in December 2011](#). A further three months was added to Al-Khawaja's prison term, and Sharaf was sentenced to six months in prison. Yet there has been no investigation into ill-treatment the two women have suffered during their arrests and detention.

We are also concerned about the well-being and safety of [Rayhana Al-Mosawi and Nafeesa Al-Asfoor](#), detained since they were arrested on 20 April while protesting the ongoing detention of detained human rights defenders including Zainab Al-Khawaja and photojournalist Ahmed Humaidan during the Formula 1 race in Manama. The two women have been denied family visits, and reportedly tortured to extract confessions, one of them with electric shocks. [Humaidan also was reportedly tortured](#) in prison after his arrest in December 2012 on charges of "demonstrating illegally."

These latest reports come shortly after Bahraini authorities indefinitely postponed your visit in late April. In November 2011, the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry (BICI) reported that five people detained in connection with protests earlier in 2011 had died as a result of torture in custody and recommended action be taken to prevent torture in detention. Bahraini authorities promised to hold accountable those responsible for torture following recommendations made under the UN's Universal Periodic Review of Bahrain, yet very little has been done to properly investigate the serious allegations of torture of prisoners by government employees and nothing has been done to effectively prevent torture and other prohibited treatment from continuing.

We therefore call on you to request the Bahraini authorities to:

1. Guarantee the safety of Nabeel Rajab and the other witnesses to torture in Jaw prison, as well as the safety of the young victims of torture, and allow detained human rights defenders and activists to have phone calls and visits with their families and lawyers;
2. Release imprisoned human rights defenders Nabeel Rajab, Zainab and Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja, and Naji Fateel, as well as photojournalist Ahmed Humaidan, and protestors Rayhana Al-Mosawi and Nafeesa Al-Asfoor, and drop all charges against them, as well as Ma'suma Sayyid Sharaf, as we believe they have been targeted in violation of their rights to freedom of assembly and freedom of expression in accordance with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights;
3. Immediately put an end to the practice of torture and ill-treatment of prisoners in Bahrain and bring those responsible to justice; while fixing a new date for the visit of the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture and a date for the visit of the ICRC;
4. Guarantee that human rights defenders in Bahrain are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals.

Signed,

1. Alkarama Foundation
2. AMAN NETWORK for Rehabilitation and defending Human Rights
3. Americans for Democracy and Human Rights in Bahrain
4. Arab Working Group for Media Monitoring
5. Arabic Network for Human Rights Information (ANHRI)
6. Avocats Sans Frontières Network
7. Bahrain Center for Human Rights (BCHR)
8. Bahrain Human Rights Observatory (BHRO)
9. Bahrain Human Rights Society
10. Bahrain Press Association (BPA)
11. Bahrain Rehabilitation and Anti-Violence Organisation (BRAVO)
12. Bahrain Transparency Society
13. Bahrain Youth Society for Human Rights (BYSHR)
14. Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies
15. Canadian Journalists for Free Expression (CJFE)
16. CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation

17. Committee to Protect Journalists
18. Democracy Observer Organization in Iraq
19. Development for People and Nature Association (DPNA), Lebanon
20. Egyptian Organization for Human Rights (EOHR)
21. Emirates Centre for Human Rights (ECHR)
22. European-Bahraini Organization for Human Rights (EBOHR)
23. Freedom Foundation Yemen
24. Freedom House
25. Front Line Defenders
26. Gulf Center for Human Rights (GCHR)
27. Human Rights First Society, Saudi Arabia
28. Index on Censorship
29. International Centre for Supporting Rights and Freedoms (ICSRF)
30. International Media Support (IMS)
31. International Press Institute (IPI)
32. Iraqi Journalists Rights Defense Association
33. Iraqi Network for Social Media (INSM)
34. Iraqi Streets bloggers
35. Khiam Rehabilitation Center for Victims of Torture
36. Lalya Center for Human Rights
37. Lawyers Rights Watch Canada (LRWC)
38. Maharat Founon, Lebanon
39. Media Center for Arab Palestinians in Israel (ILAM)
40. Media Legal Defence Initiative (MLDI)
41. Nadim Center for Rehabilitation of Victims of Violence
42. National Foundation for Efficiencies Iraq
43. National Lawyers Guild, USA
44. Norwegian PEN
45. Palestinian Center for Development and Media Freedoms (MADA)
46. PEN American Center
47. PEN Canada
48. PEN International Writers in Prison Committee
49. Reporters Without Borders (RSF)
50. SKeyes Center for Media and Cultural Freedom
51. Vigilance for Democracy and Civic State, Tunisia
52. Yemen Organization For Defending Rights& Democratic Freedoms