



# Americans for Democracy and Human Rights in Bahrain

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May 8, 2013

Ms. Irina Bokova  
Director General  
7 Place de Fontenoy  
75352 Paris 07 SP  
France

Dear Ms. Bokova:

We write to express our concern regarding the acceptance by the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) of funds from the king of Bahrain in support of the UNESCO-King Hamad Bin Isa Al-Khalifa Prize for the Use of Information and Communication Technologies in Education, a prize established to “reward projects and activities of individuals, institutions, other entities or non-governmental organizations for excellent models, best practice, and creative use of ICTs [information and communications technology] to enhance learning, teaching and overall educational performance.” Regrettably, the ideals that UNESCO aims to support in granting this prize are not reflected in the actions of the prize’s namesake. We therefore urge you to reevaluate UNESCO’s source of funding for this prize and to rename the prize to more accurately reflect UNESCO’s mission.

As you may know, the kingdom of Bahrain has suffered from significant ongoing human rights violations since the outbreak of protests there in 2011. To date, more than 100 people are estimated to have been killed—nearly all of them civilians—in the more than two years since the protests began. In addition, thousands of people have been injured in attacks by Bahraini security forces since 2011. The exact number of people injured is difficult to calculate, as many Bahrainis are afraid to seek treatment for their injuries at the public hospital out of fear that they will be arrested, interrogated, or worse by security forces still stationed there. Moreover, the Government of Bahrain has exhibited an unwillingness to allow human rights observers, [including those from the United Nations](#), to independently assess the current human rights situation in Bahrain. Suffice to say, for an island nation with a population of just over one million people, the scope of injuries and abuses inflicted upon the civilian population is remarkably high.

Unfortunately, teachers and students have also been the subject of persecution by the Bahrain government since 2011. Top leaders of the Bahrain Teachers’ Association were [arrested, abused and tortured in detention, and sentenced to jail terms](#) for exercising their rights to free speech by participating in peaceful protests. Teachers who joined them were arrested and beaten by security forces. In many cases, the Ministry of Education punished teachers who had dared to peacefully exercise their rights by [reducing their salaries, suspending them, or firing](#)

[from their jobs](#). Those teachers have yet to be compensated for their unlawful detention, or for back pay owed as a result of their salary reductions, suspensions, and firings.

Students who joined in the protests also came under attack. They were [interrogated, arrested, detained](#), and [tortured; suspended or expelled](#) from school; and [threatened with revocation of their student scholarships](#) by the Ministry of Education. They were also [forced to sign “loyalty pledges”](#) proclaiming allegiance to the regime and promising not to participate in any future protests—in short, a pledge to renounce their rights to free expression and association. In addition, their [families](#) were made to fear for their own safety. As a result of the Government of Bahrain’s retaliation against students who participated in protests, many students were unable to continue their education for an [extended period of time](#), prolonging their educational growth and development, and also denying them the right to education.

All of these abuses were done with the full knowledge and acquiescence of King Hamad Bin Isa Al-Khalifa, the individual whose namesake has been given to support a prize in education. As the Director General of UNESCO, a UN body dedicated to promoting educational leadership and opportunities for all populations, we urge you to reevaluate the prudence in associating this highly-respected body with such condemnable human rights violations which fly in the face of UNESCO’s mission. A more prudent approach would be to seek a more suitable source of funding for this prize that will be in harmony with UNESCO’s objectives.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Husain Abdulla', written over a horizontal line.

Husain Abdulla, Director