



Americans for Democracy and Human Rights in Bahrain

1001 Connecticut Ave. NW, Suite 205 • Washington, D.C. 20036 • (202) 621-6141 • www.adhrb.org • @ADHRB

21 February, 2014

His Holiness, Pope Francis I
Apostolic Palace
00120 Vatican City

Your Holiness,

We write to bring to your attention the case of Abdulwahab Hussain, a Bahraini man of faith, social worker, human rights advocate, and political prisoner of conscience suffering from a chronic neurological disorder currently serving a life sentence in Bahrain. Americans for Democracy and Human Rights in Bahrain (ADHRB) would like to encourage Your Holiness, as a spiritual leader and advocate of fundamental human rights, to advocate for the immediate and unconditional release of Abdulwahab Hussain.

In February 2011, thousands of Bahrainis took to the streets to peacefully call for democracy, freedom, and political reforms as part of a broader political movement in the Middle East. The authorities in Bahrain responded with a violent and brutal crackdown that resulted in dozens of deaths, hundreds of injuries, and thousands of arbitrary arrests. Since then, the Government of Bahrain has only continued its crack down on human rights by recently criminalizing the rights to freedom of assembly, association, and speech, while fostering a culture of impunity for human rights abusers. Arbitrary detention and the systematic use of torture continue unabated.

In addition, the government has continued its attempts to define this conflict in sectarian terms as a means to dismiss legitimate calls for basic respect and the universal human rights for people of all faiths. According to the latest report on Bahrain from the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, “sectarian tension and polarization has risen dramatically” since the 2011 unrest. Likewise, the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry and the U.S. State Department have chronicled over fifty mosques and other Shi’a places of worship that were attacked or destroyed in the same time period.

Among those arbitrarily arrested and tortured in 2011 was Mr. Hussain, a 58-year-old social worker and religious leader. He was arrested on March 17, 2011 for his peaceful expression of free speech and association with the non-violent protest movement Al-Wafa’. During his arrest, both he and his daughter were beaten by police. Since his arrest in March of 2011, Mr. Hussain



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has consistently been denied medical treatment while in detention. By November of 2013, his physical condition had deteriorated considerably. As a result, he suffers from complications relating to his chronic neurological disorder that will likely continue to worsen. In addition to his preexisting condition, Mr. Hussain is suffering from retinal laceration, deteriorating eyesight, and low blood hemoglobin. The lack of treatment has resulted in numerous infections and yet medical care is still being denied.

This is not the first time that Mr. Hussain has been targeted for exercising his fundamental human rights of free speech and association. During the protests of the 1990s, he was arrested on multiple occasions and imprisoned for more than five years. During his time in detention, he was held in solitary confinement. In early 2000, Mr. Hussain was pressured to sign a letter of apology to the Emir in exchange for a pardon. When he refused to sign it, he was held in prison for several more months. He was later released and continued to advocate for democratic and human rights reforms in Bahrain.

In recognition of the immoral charges against him and in light of the recent deterioration in his health, ADHRB hopes to build greater interfaith awareness around Abdulwahab Hussain's case. We now look to you as a spiritual leader to help take up his case. We hope that the Church will join ADHRB in calling on the Government of Bahrain to immediately and unconditionally release Mr. Hussain and drop all politically motivated charges against him, championing the supreme importance of the fundamental human rights for Bahrainis of all faiths.

If you require any further information regarding Abdulwahab Hussain's case, please do not hesitate to contact me or my staff at +1 (202) 641-6141 or via email at habdulla@adhrb.org. Thank you very much for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Husain Abdulla