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One Hundred and Thirteenth Congress
Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission

September 10, 2014

The Honorable John F. Kerry
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Kerry:

As Co-Chairmen of the bipartisan Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission, we would like to bring to your attention the recent arrest of Ms. Maryam al-Khawaja, a well-known human rights defender in Bahrain.

In 2008, Ms. al-Khawaja spoke on the state of religious freedom in Bahrain at a congressional briefing held by the Commission, and in 2011, she testified at a hearing focusing on the human rights situation in Bahrain. Ms. al-Khawaja, who until recently served as Acting Director for the well-respected Bahrain Center for Human Rights, is frequently harassed and targeted by the Bahraini government for her international advocacy for religious freedom and human rights in the country. We are deeply concerned that the Kingdom of Bahrain has falsely imprisoned Ms. al-Khawaja, and believe her recent arrest is another attempt to silence her peaceful criticism of the Bahraini government.

Ms. al-Khawaja was arrested upon her arrival at the airport in Bahrain on August 30th and charged with assaulting police officers – a charge that is arbitrary and which there is no evidence. We are worried for Ms. al-Khawaja's safety in detention, and we urge you to publicly call on the Bahraini government to immediately release her and to drop all charges. The Bahraini government must allow human rights defenders like Ms. al-Khawaja to continue their work without fear of arrest or imprisonment.

Like many other brave human rights advocates, Ms. al-Khawaja chose to speak publicly to the U.S. Congress at a tremendous risk of attacks from her own government. Failing to defend Ms. al-Khawaja jeopardizes not only her personal safety but also risks the freedom from government retribution of other human rights advocates in Bahrain.

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JANICE KAGUYUTAN
Democratic Staff Director

We appreciate your assistance in this matter and calling upon the Bahraini government to immediately and unconditionally release Ms. al-Khawaja.

Sincerely,



James P. McGovern
TLHRC Co-Chair
Member of Congress



Frank R. Wolf
TLHRC Co-Chair
Member of Congress