

## NGOs Express Concern over UK Announcement of Military Expansion in Bahrain

On 5 December 2014, the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) [announced](#) that a new defence arrangement will establish a permanent naval base for the United Kingdom in Bahrain. Americans for Democracy and Human Rights in Bahrain (ADHRB), the Bahrain Center for Human Rights (BCHR), the Bahrain Human Rights Society, the Bahrain Institute for Rights and Democracy (BIRD) the Campaign Against the Arms Trade (CAAT) and Stop the War Coalition express deep concern over the agreement and urge the United Kingdom to reconsider establishing a base in a country with severe human rights violations.

“The £15M project, which will largely be paid for by the Bahraini government, is clearly a reward for the UK’s silence on human rights abuses in Bahrain,” said Nabeel Rajab, Director of BCHR.

Following the announcement, [protesters took to the streets](#) in Bahrain to criticize British Ambassador Iain Lindsay and ask for his resignation.

“This agreement signals to the Bahrain people that the UK does not take into consideration severe human rights abuses when deciding foreign policy,” said Sayed Alwadaei, Advocacy Director at BIRD.

In London, 12 Members of Parliament signed an [Early Day Motion](#) opposing the new defence agreement. Earlier this year, the Parliaments Arms Export Committee [listed](#) Bahrain as a country of concern. In 2013, Parliament’s Foreign Affairs Committee (FAC) recommended that the FCO designate Bahrain as a “Country of Concern” in its 2014 Human Rights Report. The FAC also noted that British support for Bahrain, both in diplomatic and military terms, should not be conditioned on respect for human rights.

“The UK government should take into account the legitimate concerns of its own parliament, not to mention the international community, and reevaluate the proposed agreement,” urged ADHRB’s Executive Director Husain Abdulla.

In its 2014 [assessment](#) of the FCOs human rights work, the FAC condemned the decision not to list Bahrain as a country of concern arguing: “We see little or no evidence that Bahrain has made enough progress in implementing political reform and safeguarding human rights, and we believe that the FCO should have bitten the bullet and designated Bahrain as a country of concern”.

“Bahrain is a clear example of arms sales and the UK’s military relationships being prioritized ahead of human rights and democracy,” said CAAT’s Sarah Waldron. “There needs to be an embargo on all arms sales to the regime and an end to the extensive political support it receives.”

The aforementioned organizations call on to the UK Ministry of Defence to suspend its defence agreement with Bahrain until violations of human rights in Bahrain are addressed and substantive political reform is accomplished.