

INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM ROUNDTABLE

Washington, D.C.

May 26, 2015

The Honorable John Kerry
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Kerry,

We write to you as a coalition of organizations and individuals who represent Religious Freedom around the world through our work with human rights activists, religious scholars, and governments supporting the right to freedom of religion.

We would like to call to your attention the continued detention and mistreatment of the Bahrain 13, a group of the most prominent Bahraini leaders arrested for peacefully protesting the Bahraini's government violation of its citizens' human rights and religious freedoms. The Bahrain 13 includes prominent peaceful activists, human rights defenders, religious and political leaders, many of whom are also religious clerics. They are: Mr. Abdulwahab Hussain, Mr. Hassan Mushaima, Dr. Abduljalil al-Singace, Mr. Abdulhadi al-Khawaja, Mr. Mohammed Hassan Jawad, Mr. Ibrahim Sharif, Mr. Mohammed Habib al-Miqdad, Sheikh Mirza al-Mahrooz, Mr. Abdulhadi al-Makhdour, Mr. Salah al-Khawaja, Sheikh Saeed al-Noori, Mr. Mohammed Ali Ismael and Sheikh Abduljalil al-Miqdad.

Each of the 13 were arrested between 17 March and 9 April 2011 in connection with their role in Bahrain's 2011 peaceful protest movement calling for democratic change and political justice in the country. In June 2011, they were tried by a special military court, and convicted of trying to overthrow the government, the group received sentences ranging from five years to life in prison. A military appeals court upheld the sentences in September 2011. There were two other retrials in April 2012 and September 2014, however both times the sentences were upheld. On 7 January 2013, the defendants lost their last appeal when the Court of Cessation, Bahrain's top court upheld the sentences. Since their arrest, all of the Bahrain 13 have suffered torture and ill-treatment.

After four years in prison, many of the Bahrain 13 continue to face degrading treatment, poor living conditions, denial of necessary medical care and religious persecution.

The Bahrain 13 are representative of the systemic crisis of religious discrimination in Bahrain, particularly at Jaw Prison. Their religious identity proves to be a vulnerability in the eyes of Jaw Prison guards who use it to degrade and humiliate them. Prison guards have committed multiple acts of religious persecution against the Bahrain 13, including shaving the heads and beards of the Shia Clerics and disrupting certain aspects of Shia prayer rituals. This breaks the spirits of the Bahrain 13 by insulting the moral foundations which drive their human rights work. Many of the prisoners, including Hassan Mushaima and Abdulwahab Hussain have expressed grave despair at their situation. Dr. Abduljalil al-Singace has been on hunger strike since March 21st 2015 in protest of these conditions.

The Bahrain 13 remain helpless against protecting their religious and human rights despite the fact that Bahrain has ratified international conventions that require the government to uphold the freedoms of religion and belief.

We urge the United States Government and the U.S. Department of State to call for the release of the Bahrain 13. We also urge the U.S. Department of State to support all Bahrainis' rights to Freedom of Religion by pressing the Bahraini Government to investigate the allegations of degrading treatment of the Bahrain 13 and hold those responsible accountable for their actions.

Very Respectfully,

ORGANIZATIONS

Americans for Democracy & Human Rights in Bahrain

Bahrain Institute for Rights and Democracy

Center for Inquiry

Christian Solidarity Worldwide – United Kingdom

Church of Scientology National Affairs Office

Human Rights Law Foundation

International Institute for Religious Freedom

Russian Orthodox Autonomous Church of America

Shia Rights Watch

United Methodist Church, General Board of Church & Society

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