

Mr. President,

On behalf of Americans for Democracy and Human Rights in Bahrain, and in response to His Excellency the High Commissioner's update, I would like to emphasize my shared concern for the growing restrictions on freedom of expression.

In GCC countries like Bahrain, laws restricting free expression have resulted in the detention of over 3,000 political prisoners, many of whom have been tortured and ill-treated. In detention facilities like Bahrain's Jau Prison, inmates imprisoned on charges related to free expression have even died as a result of torture. This is the case of my husband, human rights blogger Zakariya Ashiri.

In 2011, Zakariya was arbitrarily arrested on charges related to his freedom of expression. One week following his arrest, he died in the custody of Bahraini authorities. Though authorities allege that his death was the consequence of complications resulting from his sickle cell anemia condition, post-mortem photos showed deep wounds, bruises and other brutal injuries on his body, consistent with practices of torture. Mr. President, Mr. High Commissioner, to this day, I still do not know how to tell my children that their father was tortured and killed by our government.

It is devastating to families like mine, that in countries like Bahrain, the consequence of free expression may be arrest, torture and even death.

Thus, with the memory of Zakariya in mind, we call the council's attention to Bahrain's serious violations of human rights, including consistent violation of the right to freedom of expression. It is my hope that by raising the case of my husband to you, we may avoid the death of other political prisoners by torture, which is systematic and ongoing in Bahrain.

Thank you.