

Mr. President,

Americans for Democracy & Human Rights in Bahrain would like to raise our deep concern over a negative international trend toward restrictions on the right to free expression. The Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action mandates that governments guarantee freedom of expression. Nevertheless, states continue to violate this basic human right.

To better illustrate this trend, we would like to read a brief statement transmitted to us by Fadhel Abbas, the imprisoned Secretary-General of the Bahraini opposition society al-Wahdawi, or National Democratic Alliance.

“Throughout my career as an activist and political leader, I have stood up for two core principles: self-determination and basic human rights. In March of this year, I found that the Gulf Cooperation Council-led intervention into Yemen violated both these principles, and I spoke out publicly against my home nation’s involvement in the war, stating that its actions violated international law.

“For this act, authorities charged me with ‘spreading rumors’ during a time of war. As evidence against me, the public prosecution submitted to the court Tweets critical of the war that I had published. In June, the judge sentenced me to 5 years in prison. It is clear that I have been prosecuted both for my anti-war statements and my peaceful opposition, and I ask the Human Rights Council to defend my universal right to free expression and opinion.”

Mr. President, we call on all states that criminalize peaceful expression, such as Bahrain, to immediately release all those imprisoned for their free expression and to review and amend all laws with a view towards ensuring international standards of free expression, in line with Section II of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action.

Thank you.