

28 November 2016

To: Sheikh Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa  
King of Bahrain  
P.O. Box 555  
Rifa'a Palace  
Kingdom of Bahrain

CC :

Hon. Zeid Ra'ad Zeid al-Husseini  
High Commissioner for Human Rights  
Office of the High Commissioner for Human  
Rights  
52 Rue des Paquis  
CH-1201 Geneva  
Switzerland

High Representative of the European Union for  
Foreign Affairs and Security Policy  
Frederica Mogherini  
European Commission  
Rue de la Loi/Wetstraat 200  
1049 1049 Brussels  
Belgium

Mr. John F. Kerry  
United States Secretary of State  
United States Department of State  
2201 C Street NW  
Washington, DC 20520  
United States

The Right Honorable Boris Johnson  
Foreign & Commonwealth Office  
King Charles Street  
London  
SW1A 2AH  
United Kingdom

King Hamad,

We, the undersigned, express our deep concern with the Government of Bahrain's campaign targeting journalists and activists exercising their right to free expression. On 9 October 2016, the Public Prosecution [charged](#) Faisal Hayyat, a sports journalist and social media activist, with insulting a sect and a religious figure. The government's repeated harassment of Faisal and other online activists demonstrate the ongoing criminalization of free expression in Bahrain.

Faisal Hayyat is a renowned journalist and has appeared on various sports channels and has written for local Bahraini newspapers, *Alalam*, *Albilad*, and *Akhbar Al Khaleej*. He directs and [presents](#) short video programs online that provide critical perspectives on local politics.

Bahraini officials previously arrested Faisal in April 2011 for his involvement in the 2011 pro-democracy protests. The Bahraini security forces detained him for 84 days. During his detainment, authorities subjected Faisal to physical and psychological [torture](#), including sexual harassment and degrading treatment. He has been vocal about this and recently published a [letter](#) on social media to the Bahraini Minister of Interior detailing the torture to which the government had subjected him. Government

authorities never provided compensation for the abuse and never held any officials accountable. In the letter Faisal mentions, “I write this and I know it may cost me my freedom.”

On 7 October, Faisal published tweets commenting on events from early Islamic history. Two days later, Faisal was arrested and charged with “insulting a sect.” The government is therefore treating Faisal Hayyat’s opinion on events of Islamic history as a criminal liability. The government’s decision to prosecute him infringes both his freedom of expression and religion.

The undersigned NGOs believe Faisal has been targeted as part of a silencing [campaign](#) against critical voices of the government. Recently, the Bahraini government has brought further criminal charges against human rights defender Nabeel Rajab for an open letter [published](#) in the *New York Times*, and against political opposition leader Ebrahim Sharif for an [interview](#) he gave with the *Associated Press*. Furthermore, the opposition politician Fedhel Abbas received three years in prison for tweets criticizing the war in Yemen.

We, therefore, call on the authorities to respect Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which mandates that “Everyone shall have the right to freedom of expression.” The Bahraini government must also respect Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), which mandates that “Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontier.”

As organizations concerned with the right to freedom of expression, we call on the Government of Bahrain to:

- Immediately and unconditionally release Faisal Hayyat, Nabeel Rajab, and all internet users arrested and imprisoned for merely exercising their right to freedom of expression; and
- Abide by international human rights standards, including the ICCPR and UDHR, by upholding the right to freedom of expression without any restrictions.

Signed,

Americans for Democracy & Human Rights in Bahrain  
Adil Soz - International Foundation for Protection of Freedom of Speech  
Afghanistan Journalists Center  
Africa Freedom of Information Centre  
Albanian Media Institute  
ARTICLE 19  
Bahrain Center for Human Rights  
Bytes for All  
Cambodian Center for Human Rights  
Canadian Journalists for Free Expression



The global network  
DEFENDING AND PROMOTING  
FREE EXPRESSION

Center for Independent Journalism - Romania  
Centre for Independent Journalism - Malaysia  
Freedom Forum  
Freedom House  
Free Media Movement  
Gulf Centre for Human Rights  
Human Rights Network for Journalists - Uganda  
Hungarian Civil Liberties Union  
Independent Journalism Center - Moldova  
Index on Censorship  
Institute for Reporters' Freedom and Safety  
Institute for the Studies on Free Flow of Information  
International Federation of Journalists  
International Press Centre  
International Press Institute  
Maharat Foundation  
MARCH  
Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance  
Media Institute of Southern Africa  
Palestinian Center for Development and Media Freedoms - MADA  
PEN International  
Reporters Without Borders  
Social Media Exchange - SMEX  
South East European Network for Professionalization of Media  
Vigilance pour la Démocratie et l'État Civique  
World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters - AMARC  
World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers  
Bahrain Institute for Rights and Democracy (BIRD)  
Bahrain Press Association (BPA)  
Burundi Child Rights Coalition  
English PEN  
European - Bahraini Organisation for Human Rights (EBOHR)  
European Center for Democracy and Human Rights (ECDHR)  
Project on Middle East Democracy (POMED)  
Union de Jeunes pour la Paix et le Développement