



Mr. President,

This session, the Special Procedures released a communication on the Bahraini government's dissolution of the largest opposition political society in the kingdom, al-Wefaq. One year ago, authorities seized al-Wefaq's headquarters, froze its assets, closed its website, and suspended all activities of the society.

Yet, Bahrain's response to these concerns was to move forward with the dissolution of Wa'ad, the country's largest secular opposition group, over unsubstantiated allegations of inciting violence. With both Wa'ad and al-Wefaq dissolved, the government is effectively closing all space for legitimate political debate and dissent.

Opposition leaders also face judicial harassment. Al-Wefaq's Secretary-General, Sheikh Ali Salman, is currently serving a four-year sentence for charges including "inciting hatred" stemming from a peaceful political speech. On 20 March 2017, the authorities issued similar charges against Ebrahim Sharif of Wa'ad over posts he made on social media. Furthermore, courts upheld a three-year prison sentence against Fadhel Abbas, leader of the leftist Al-Wahdawi society, for his group's criticism of the Yemen war.

The Bahraini government has systematically eroded the space for peaceful political opposition. We call upon the Council and the international community to condemn the closure of Wa'ad and Al-Wefaq, as well as the judicial harassment of opposition leaders more broadly. We also call for the immediate release of all political prisoners, including Sheikh Ali Salman and Fadhel Abbas, and for the removal of restrictions on the freedoms of speech, press, and assembly.

Thank you