



13 November 2018

Arizona Commerce Authority  
118 N 7th Avenue  
Suite 400  
Phoenix, Arizona 85007

Dear Ms. Sandra Watson,

We write to you regarding your participation in the [Bahrain International Airshow](#) on November 14 - 16. We are concerned that your participation in the airshow amounts to implicit support for the Bahraini government, which has been condemned by international [human rights](#) organizations for committing widespread and systematic human rights abuses, and that your participation helps the Bahraini government whitewash such abuses. The government regularly uses international public events like the airshow to divert attention from its repressive policies towards its religious majority, journalists, human rights defenders, civil society, and critics. As your involvement with this event gives cover to these abuses and grants implicit support to the government's repressive measures, we strongly urge you to withdraw from this event and publicly condemn Bahrain's human rights violations.

Bahrain systemically restricts the right of freedom of expression, arbitrarily arresting, detaining, torturing, and sentencing critics of the government to prison sentences. Among those who are in prison for expression-related crimes is Nabeel Rajab, a prominent human rights defender and the President of the Bahrain Center for Human Rights. Rajab is currently serving a [seven-year prison term](#) for speaking with foreign press and posting tweets criticizing human rights abuses in Bahrain. The government also maintains [14 additional charges](#) against them that could lead to further prison time. While in prison, Rajab has been denied necessary medical treatment. He has also spent nine months in solitary confinement, which, [according](#) to the United Nations Special Rapporteur on torture, may "amount to torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment when used as a punishment."

The Bahraini government also imprisoned [Sheik Ali Salman](#) on free expression-related charges, in 2014, sentencing him to four years in prison for speeches he gave as Secretary General of Al Wefaq National Islamic Society, formerly Bahrain's largest political opposition society, until it was [dissolved](#) in July 2016. While in prison, the government brought an additional charge against him, accusing him of committing espionage for Qatar during the 2011 Arab Spring mass pro-democracy protests in Bahrain, a charge that may have carried the death penalty. At the time, Qatar was thought to play a mediating role between the government and protesters following the violent attacks on peaceful protests. These efforts were public and supported by the United States, with the Bahraini government's full knowledge of them. Bahrain's Foreign Minister, Khalid bin Ahmed Al Khalifa, even [publicly praised](#) the role of Qatar in an article published in Bahrain's official daily newspaper "Alayam." Despite this, on 4 November 2018, the High Criminal Court sentenced Sheikh Salman to life in prison, drawing expressions of concern from the [European Union](#), [United Kingdom](#), and the [United States](#). Along with the dissolution of Al Wefaq, the government has targeted other political opposition societies for dissolution, including the secular National Democratic Action Society, [Wa'ad](#). As a result of these efforts, Bahrain has effectively closed all independent political and civil society space.

In addition to suppressing dissent and limiting free expression, Bahrain has targeted, imprisoned, or killed journalists for doing their jobs. [Ahmed Humaidan](#), [Mahmood al-Jazeera](#), and [Sayed Ahmed al-Mousawi](#) are currently in prison having been arrested for photographing anti-government protests or criticizing the government. In 2012, Bahraini security forces shot [Ahmed Ismail Hassan](#), a photojournalist who was photographing protesters at a Formula One race; he later died of his injuries. Despite this, no one has been prosecuted or even charged with his murder, demonstrating the culture of impunity that runs throughout Bahrain's security establishment.

In addition to severely restricting the right to free expression and closing independent civil and political space, Bahrain engages in systematic torture of dissidents. In its 2017 report, the United Nations Committee against Torture (CAT) expressed its [concern](#) that "there continue to be numerous and consistent allegations of widespread torture and ill-treatment of persons who are deprived of their liberty in all places of detention, as well as the climate of impunity." The CAT also expressed its concern at the "numerous reports of the continued widespread use of forced confessions as evidence in courts and at the widespread acceptance by judges of forced confessions." The CAT expressed additional concern over the promulgation of an amendment to the Constitution allowing military courts to try civilians in cases related to national security. Such trials, the CAT notes, are unfair and judgements are often reached based on confessions coerced through torture.

The broad concerns raised about Bahrain by the Committee against Torture have been exacerbated by concerns raised by the United Nations Committee on Civil and Political Rights (CCPR), which released its [report](#) on Bahrain in July 2018. In their report, the CCPR scrutinizes Bahrain's commitment to civil and political rights, expressing deep concern over Bahrain's broad anti-terror, cybercrime, and press laws, which have been used to suppress free expression, assembly, and association. The CCPR also raised serious concerns regarding reports of torture in prisons and death sentences imposed on the basis of confessions obtained under duress. The CCPR highlighted the risk of child marriages, the lack of equal rights between men and women in nationality laws, and the government's use of non-independent and not-impartial human rights institutions to whitewash these concerns.

The Government of Bahrain systematically violates international human rights laws, norms, and standards, engaging in systematic torture, violating due process rights, closing political and civil society space, and criminalizing dissent. Its rights record has rightly come under scrutiny from international human rights organizations, foreign governments, and the United Nations. To participate in the Bahrain International Airshow is to demonstrate support for Bahrain's repressive policies and rights violations and to assist the government in putting on a public relations front meant to whitewash the government's rampant abuses. Therefore, we strongly urge you to withdraw from the airshow and to use your platform to criticize Bahrain and draw attention to its widespread and systematic human rights violations.

Sincerely,



Husain Abdulla  
Executive Director  
Americans for Democracy & Human Rights in Bahrain