



Mr. Simon Coveney T.D.  
Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade

14 November 2018

Honourable Mr. Coveney T.D.,

We write to express grave concern over the Government of Bahrain's suppression of civil and political society ahead of the Kingdom's parliamentary election scheduled for 24 November. Bahraini authorities have forcibly dissolved all major opposition groups, shut down the only independent newspaper, and jailed thousands of political prisoners, including leading politicians and human rights defenders. Sheikh Ali Salman, the leader of Bahrain's largest opposition group (now dissolved), was [sentenced](#) to life on 4 November. [Amnesty International](#) described the charges as solely related to freedom of expression and the verdict as a "travesty of justice". This development is particularly concerning as it shows that Bahrain is not meeting the conditions necessary for fair and free elections; the current situation represents a mockery of democracy.

Serious questions remain over the legitimacy of the current parliament as the ruling family has crushed the peaceful protest for democratic change. Instead, the monarchy uses Parliament to pass increasingly draconian measures against its citizens. We call on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade to make strong representations to Bahrain before the upcoming vote on behalf of the Irish Republic urging immediate democratic and human rights reform, including the right for self-determination as enshrined in the [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#) (ICCPR) Article 1.

### **Crackdown Against Political Opposition and Civil Society**

Bahraini authorities have virtually dismantled all political opposition in the country, and the few opposition leaders who remain outside prison are banned from ever again standing for election. Since 2011, the government crushed informal opposition groups like the Haq movement and arbitrarily shuttered all three major opposition societies: [Amal](#), [Al-Wefaq](#), [Wa'ad](#). This year, Bahrain enacted [legislation](#) barring anyone who has ever belonged to these groups from seeking or holding elected office, as well as anyone sentenced to more than six months in prison, even when their arrest was a result of their legitimate criticism against the government. Between the membership of the dissolved opposition groups and the countless Bahrainis incarcerated on charges that criminalise free expression and assembly, the ban affects tens of thousands of people.



Bahrain's leading opposition politicians are languishing in jail along with thousands of other political prisoners. [Sheikh Ali Salman](#), the Secretary-General of Al-Wefaq, has been incarcerated since 2014 and on 4 November 2018, he was [sentenced](#) to life imprisonment after the Court of Appeal found him guilty of spying for Qatar. Those that spearheaded Bahrain's peaceful Arab Spring movement in 2011 such as Hassan Mushaima, Dr. Abduljalil Al-Singace, and Abdulwahab Hussain are serving life sentences in the notorious Jau Prison, where authorities [have intensified](#) their mistreatment of high-profile prisoners of conscience. In recent years, the Jau administration has unlawfully denied these prisoners access to necessary healthcare, restricted their access to medication, and arbitrarily confiscated personal items and reading materials. The abuse of [Hassan Mushaima](#), a 70-year-old cancer survivor, became [so severe](#) that his son, Ali, held a [63-day sit-in protest](#), including [44 days of hunger strike](#) outside the Bahraini Embassy in London demanding his father be provided with unfettered medical treatment, family visitations and access to books.

Any civil and political space is effectively closed. The only independent newspaper, [Al-Wasat](#), was forced to close in 2017, and at least 15 journalists are presently [detained](#) in Bahrain. International human rights organisations, foreign media outlets, and United Nations experts are consistently [barred](#) from entering the country to investigate abuses or monitor developments like elections. The most prominent human rights defender, Bahrain Center for Human Rights' president [Nabeel Rajab](#), has now joined his partner [Abdulahadi al-Khawaja](#) in prison for comments deemed critical of the government, and excessively broad anti-terror and cybercrime laws that effectively criminalise dissent and civil society activism. The family of London-based Bahraini activist [Sayed Ahmed Alwadaei](#), are now serving lengthy prison sentences based on trumped-up charges, in reprisal to his human rights work. Evidently, the Bahraini regime goes to extreme lengths to suppress dissent.

### **Our Demands:**

Given these conditions, it seems impossible to have credible and legitimate elections. Sheikh Salman's life sentence speaks to the Bahraini government's steadfast commitment to silencing political dissent. The [US](#) has already done so, and the [EU](#) has also argued that it is "in the interest of the long-term stability of the country and its citizens" to reconsider the sentence upon appeal. It is vital that you follow suit by publicly condemning the ruling and calling for his immediate release.

We noticed your concern for the deteriorating human rights situation in Bahrain in your response to a [parliamentary question](#) provided on 20 September 2018, wherein you asserted that:



*“The shrinking of civil and political space [in Bahrain] is particularly concerning in light of parliamentary elections which are due to take place in November this year.”*

As members of this parliament, we, therefore, urge you to fulfil your promise to *“call on the Bahraini Government to make good on their stated commitment to make progress in the area of human rights.”* Specifically, in anticipation of the elections, we request that you call on the Bahraini government to meet clear reform criteria to ensure the legitimacy of the vote, namely:

- To release all political prisoners, including opposition leaders like Sheikh Ali Salman Hassan Mushaima, Abdulwahab Hussain, and human rights defenders like Nabeel Rajab, Abdulhadi al-Khawaja and Dr. Abduljalil al-Singace;
- Restore opposition groups and allow their full participation in the elections, including by lifting the ban on members of dissolved groups running for office;
- Allow international bodies to enter Bahrain in order to monitor the elections;
- Protect freedom of the press and reinstate independent newspapers like Al-Wasat; and
- Decriminalise peaceful dissent by amending the penal code, anti-terror, and cyber-crime legislation.

Sincerely,

Maureen O’ Sullivan - Independent TD

Noel Grealish - Independent TD

Thomas Pringle - Independent TD

Thomas Broughan - Independent TD

Clare Daly - Independent TD

Catherine Connelly - Independent TD

Naill Collins on behalf of 44 TDs of Fianna Fáil party

Seán Crowe on behalf of 22 TDs and 6 senators of Sinn Féin party