



Camera dei Deputati



His Majesty,
King of Bahrain
Hamad Bin Isa Al Khalifa

P.O. Box 555 Rifa'a Palace
Manama, Bahrain

20 November 2018

Your Majesty,

I write regarding the upcoming elections for Bahrain's lower house of parliament, the Council of Representatives, taking place on 24 November. I am deeply concerned about the restrictive political environment in Bahrain, in particular the government's effective closing of all civil and political space.

To ensure international recognition of election results, I ask you to take all necessary steps to ensure the elections' credibility, allowing the formation of independent civil and political society organisations.

In order for the elections to meet international standards of free and fair elections, citizens must be able to organise politically and have the opportunity to support a wide range of candidates running for office. However, your government's decision to forcibly dissolve all major political opposition groups, including Al-Wefaq and Wa'ad, deprives large sectors of the population of their preferred political associations.

Your government's decision in May 2018 to amend the Law on the Exercise of Political Rights has had a severely detrimental effect on ensuring the elections are free and fair. The amendment bans anyone who has ever belonged to one of the dissolved opposition societies for running for office, as well as anyone sentenced to more than six months in prison. Between the membership of the dissolved opposition groups and the countless Bahrainis incarcerated on charges that criminalise free expression and assembly, the ban prohibits potentially tens of thousands of people from holding elected office. This move has further exacerbated our concerns about political representation, as individuals who have historic affiliations with dissolved political societies are being denied political participation in these elections.

Free and fair elections can only occur when citizens are free to express and debate their views on matters of public concern. Yet, the only independent newspaper, Al-Wasat, was forcibly closed in 2017, while at least 15 journalists are currently imprisoned. In addition, foreign media looking into human rights concerns are barred from entering the country.

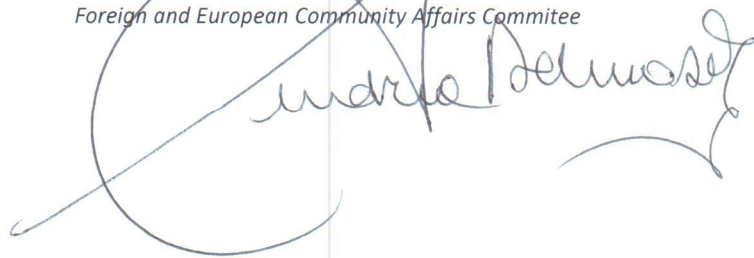
Bahrain's electoral infrastructure is inherently disadvantageous to the political opposition. Voting districts have been drawn to disenfranchise the Shia community and to significantly favour the minority Sunni population. Polling stations are not tied to specific constituencies and are thus vulnerable to manipulation and interference. Furthermore, there is no independent and impartial electoral commission to investigate concerns or allegations of voter fraud or intimidation at the polls, nor has your government committed to permitting independent domestic or international election monitoring.

The upcoming elections should be an opportunity for Bahrain to ease tensions and allow space for open dialogue to take place. Instead, we have seen the enactment of increasingly repressive measures. Under these conditions, Bahrain's elections cannot be recognised by the international community as free, fair, or legitimate. I strongly encourage you to:

1. Facilitate independent and impartial election monitoring by international observers and the United Nations throughout the election process;
2. Redraw electoral districts to eliminate gerrymandering;
3. Repeal the May 2018 amendment to the Law on the Exercise of Political Rights.

Your Sincerely,

On. Andrea Delmastro delle Vedove
Member of the Chamber of Deputies
Foreign and European Community Affairs Committee

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Andrea Delmastro", is written over a large, faint circular watermark or stamp. The signature is fluid and cursive, extending to the right of the page.