

4 January 2019

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo
United States Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Pompeo,

We, the undersigned human rights organizations, write to you ahead of your [upcoming travels](#) to Manama, Bahrain between January 8 and 15, 2019. While we understand the importance of addressing regional security in the context of countering terrorism threats and ways to expand bilateral cooperation in your meetings with Bahraini officials, we deeply regret the absence of human rights in the [list of topics](#) to be discussed during your visit. We would like to raise serious concerns over the current human rights situation in Bahrain and its implications for broader US security and stability, and we encourage you to raise to your Bahraini counterparts, both privately and publically, the importance of the Bahraini government adhering to its human rights obligations.

The Arabian Gulf and Bahrain remain crucial focal points in US national security, especially because Bahrain houses the United States 5th Fleet. But, the Bahraini government's repressive tactics against civil and political society have the very real potential to lead to severe unrest in the kingdom. This would compromise Bahrain's national stability and jeopardize US security interests in the region at a time when President Trump is attempting to address complex regional concerns. Promoting the US' long-term security in the Arabian Gulf, with partners like Bahrain, is best achieved by supporting sustainable allies, an endeavor which is endangered by the potential for unrest and violence stemming from harsh restrictions on political and social freedoms.

Just a couple months ago, Bahrain held elections for its lower house of Parliament, which were neither free nor fair due to severe restrictions against civil and political society. The elections were marred by the [forced lack of participation](#) from political opposition groups, the gerrymandering of electoral districts, the [criminalization](#) of calls to boycott the elections, and the imprisonment of political leaders. Just weeks before the elections, the government sentenced the former Secretary General of al-Wefaq, Bahrain's largest political opposition society, [Sheikh Ali Salman](#), to life in prison on bogus 'espionage' charges dating back to 2011. The State Department itself raised [concerns](#) regarding Sheikh Salman's verdict and pledged to engage with the Government of Bahrain on issues surrounding freedoms and human rights. Despite these concerns, the State Department went on to [praise](#) Bahrain's 'sham' elections. Given this and the deeply flawed nature of the elections, we believe it is important for the US to reiterate its support for free and fair elections in which members of the political opposition are able to participate. We thus urge you, Secretary Pompeo, to meet with members of the political opposition, including those who are imprisoned.

Bahrain also continues to target, harass, and imprison activists and human rights defenders for exercising their right to free expression. Just last week, Bahrain's highest appeals court [denied](#) prominent human rights defender Nabeel Rajab's final appeal – upholding his five-year prison sentence for tweets and re-tweets critical of the Bahraini government and its policies. With the decision, Nabeel has exhausted all legal remedies to reverse the charges, and will remain in prison until 2023. He has

already served a two-year prison sentence on charges related to television interviews in which he discussed the human rights situation in the kingdom, a sentence the State Department [condemned](#). The State Department has raised concerns about Nabeel's case in previous conversations with the Bahraini Government, and we encourage you to continue these conversations during your visit and to also call for Nabeel's immediate and unconditional release. We further ask that you meet with Nabeel in prison during your time in Bahrain.

Moreover, the Kingdom of Bahrain continues to subject human rights defenders to various forms of reprisals. The government has actively prevented independent Bahraini civil society, from leaving the country to communicate with the international community, using widespread retaliatory travel bans and arbitrary detention. The Bahraini government has also amplified its [targeting](#) of human rights defenders and the families of activists in exile, and regularly uses torture to threaten activists like human rights defender [Ebtesam al-Saegh](#), who was physically, psychologically, and sexually tortured by Bahraini authorities.

Additionally, Bahrain has increasingly used citizenship revocation as a tool to silence dissent, stripping critics of the government of their Bahraini citizenship. This past year saw a record number of denaturalizations in Bahrain: the government revoked the citizenship of over 300 people, bringing the total number of people made stateless to over 800. Bahraini authorities have largely used this practice as a means of reprisal against civil society activists, opposition politicians, human rights defenders, journalists, and other individuals they deem critical of the government. They have also disproportionately targeted members of the kingdom's marginalized Shia Muslim majority community which, when paired with fast-tracking citizenship for non-resident Sunni Muslims, is gradually altering the demographic makeup of the country.

Bahrain clearly does not meet its human rights obligations. On the contrary, it systematically represses fundamental freedoms and political, civil, and human rights. The level and manner of this repression may pose a threat to US security and stability in the region. Due to this, we ask that you make human rights a point of conversation in your meetings with Bahraini leaders during your January visit, and that you raise human rights concerns both publically and privately. The US can play a positive role when it comes to the cases of prisoners of conscience in Bahrain by raising individual cases to Bahraini leaders, including the cases of Sheikh Ali Salman and Nabeel Rajab. We strongly urge you to raise their cases, both of which the State Department has previously condemned, and to call on the Bahraini government to release them and all other prisoners of conscience.

Sincerely,

American's for Democracy & Human Rights in Bahrain

Bahrain Institute for Rights and Democracy

European Centre for Democracy and Human Rights