



8 October 2019

Mr. Jérôme Cauchard
Ambassador-designee of France to the Kingdom of Bahrain
Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs
37 Quai d'Orsay, 75007
Paris, France

Dear Mr. Cauchard,

On behalf of Americans for Democracy & Human Rights in Bahrain (ADHRB), I would like to welcome and congratulate you on your appointment as Ambassador of France to the Kingdom of Bahrain. As you well know, this is a position of great importance.

Ahead of your travel to Bahrain to present your credentials and take up your position, we want to bring to your attention our deep and longstanding concerns over the Government of Bahrain's restrictions on political space and widespread and systematic suppression of fundamental freedoms and human rights. Upon your assumption of responsibilities, we strongly urge you to use your position to raise concerns surrounding the suppression of human rights, targeting of opposition political activists, detention of Shia clerics and religious leaders, attacks on peaceful demonstrations, and credible allegations of systematic torture with high-level Bahraini officials. We also urge you to regularly meet with activists, human rights defenders, and political opposition members, and to demonstrate leadership on human rights issues by coordinating among embassies and missions in Manama to present a united front on human rights.

We have long been concerned over the Bahraini government's moves to restrict political opposition space. Even before the mass pro-democracy protests erupted in February 2011, critics have raised [concerns](#) over [gerrymandering](#) of parliamentary elections and the denial of the "one person, one-vote" principle. In 2010 elections for the lower house of parliament – the only elected government body in Bahrain – the political opposition, led by Al-Wefaq, the largest political opposition group, and a Shia political society, won 64 percent of the electorate, but [secured](#) only 18 out of 40 seats in parliament. Political opposition societies have continued to raise concerns over gerrymandering and electoral interference. Ahead of the 2014 elections for the lower house of parliament, Al-Wefaq, the secular leftist National Democratic Action Society (also known as Wa'ad), and other, smaller political opposition societies [boycotted](#) the elections due to their unfair nature.

Since 2014, the Bahraini government has moved to suppress opposition political societies. In December 2014, the government [summoned](#) Sheikh Ali Salman, the Secretary General of Al-Wefaq, for questioning on vague grounds of "violating certain aspects of law" and accused him of "inciting hatred against the regime." In July 2015, a court [sentenced](#) Sheikh Salman to four years in prison on charges Amnesty International claimed was "solely for peacefully expressing his opinion." This move drew [concern](#) from France's Foreign Ministry. A year later, the government [accused](#) Al-Wefaq of fostering terrorism, paving the way for a court to order the society to dissolve. This move drew international condemnation, including from the [French Foreign Ministry](#) and former [United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon](#). Then in May 2017, a court [ordered](#) Wa'ad to dissolve, a decision that was upheld in October 2018. In November 2018, only two weeks ahead of elections for the lower house of parliament, Sheikh Salman was [sentenced](#) to life in prison on spurious charges of espionage, once again drawing condemnation from the [French Foreign Ministry](#).

Following the dissolution of Al-Wefaq and Wa'ad and ahead of the November 2018 parliamentary elections, the Bahraini government moved to further restrict space for political opposition engagement by passing [legislation](#) barring anyone who has ever belonged to a dissolved opposition group from seeking or holding elected office. The legislation additionally barred anyone who had received prison terms longer than six months. It thus affected thousands of Bahrainis, not only members of any of the dissolved political opposition societies, but also political prisoners who had been arrested on the basis of free expression and free assembly charges. It is estimated that Bahrain holds as many as [4,000 political prisoners](#), making it among the largest per capita jailers in the Middle East. While the elections went forward, as a [result of these measures](#) – dissolution of political opposition societies, gerrymandering, and electoral legislation – they were neither free nor fair.

In addition to targeting political opposition activists, the Bahraini government has engaged in a sustained campaign to suppress and arrest human rights defenders. Among those detained and imprisoned is [Nabeel Rajab](#), one of Bahrain's most prominent human rights activists. Rajab has been [detained](#) since his arrest in June 2016 and he was sentenced to two years in prison in 2017 on free expression charges stemming from television interviews he gave in 2015 and 2016. In 2018 he was sentenced to five years in prison for tweeting and re-tweeting criticism of the war in Yemen and torture in Bahrain's Jau Prison. His five year sentence was [upheld](#) on 31 December 2018, and he will remain in prison until 2023. His case has drawn attention from the [French Foreign Ministry](#) as well as the [United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights](#). In addition to Rajab, numerous other human rights activists remain in prison, including members of the [Bahrain 13](#) – clerics, activists, political activists, and human rights defenders – like Hassan Mushaima, Abdulhadi AlKhawaja, and Dr. Abduljalil AlSingace.

We have also been deeply concerned over the Bahraini government's use of reprisals against activists in an effort to keep them from engaging with international human rights mechanisms, including the United Nations. The Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights (ASG) Andrew Gilmour has repeatedly raised concerns about Bahrain, including the kingdom in five of the last seven reports. In the [2019 report](#), Gilmour expressed concern for the ongoing harassment and intimidation against Bahraini civil society representatives and human rights defenders working with the Human Rights Council. He highlighted the cases of London-based Sayed Ahmed Alwadaei, Hajer Mansoor – his mother-in-law – [Ebtisam AlSaegh](#), Medina Ali, Najah Yusuf, and Rajab. The report also expresses concern over [retaliatory travel bans](#) and arbitrary detention as acts of reprisal against activists.

In a new practice, the Government of Bahrain has used mass trials to try and sentence hundreds of individuals *en masse*. Since January 2018, there have been five mass trials, in which 505 individuals have been sentenced. In January 2019, Bahrain's Court of Appeals upheld the conviction of 115 Bahraini individuals in the mass trial of the "Zulfiqar Brigades." The court's decision came in spite of allegations, including by the [United Nations \(UN\) Special Procedures](#) that officials tortured the defendants in order to secure confessions. On 27 February 2019, Bahrain [issued](#) a verdict in another mass trial of 171 defendants, sentencing 167 people to prison terms for their participation in a non-violent sit-in in the village of Duraz. The UN Special Procedures had also previously [raised concerns](#) regarding the situation in Duraz, in particular Bahraini security forces' excessive use of force on peaceful protests and the arrest and subsequent detention of protestors in locations where they are subjected to torture and ill treatment. On 27 May 2019, the Court of Appeals upheld the conviction of these individuals, though some had their sentences reduced.

On 16 April 2019, Bahrain's Fourth High Criminal Court issued the final verdict in a separate mass trial of the so-called "[Bahrain Hezbollah cell](#)," despite concerns regarding arbitrary detention, torture, and ill-

treatment of the 169 defendants. The court acquitted 30 defendants and revoked the citizenship of 138 individuals. It sentenced 69 defendants to life in prison, 39 to 10 years in prison, 23 to seven years in prison, and eight men to five years in prison or fewer. In response, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet [issued a statement](#) expressing “alarm at the court decision in Bahrain that revoked the nationalities of 138 people after a mass trial” and raising concern that “the court proceedings failed to comply with international fair trial standards.”

As a result of international disapproval of Bahrain’s use of mass citizenship revocation, on 20 April 2019, Bahrain’s King Hamad [issued](#) an order reinstating the citizenship of 551 individuals previously stripped of their Bahraini citizenship through criminal convictions. Since 2012, the Bahraini government has denationalized 990 people, meaning that the status of 439 persons born with Bahraini citizenship remains unknown. Many of those renationalized are still sentenced to the death penalty or life in prison.

Bahrain has increasingly issued death sentences in recent years, sentencing 15 people to death in 2017 and 12 in 2018. On 28 January 2019, the Bahrain High Court of Appeals confirmed the death sentences against Ali AlArab and Ahmed AlMalali. Both alleged security forces had tortured them to produce confessions and both were sentenced in unfair trials. On 27 July, Bahrain [executed](#) AlArab and AlMalali along with a Bangladeshi man, about which little is known. Their executions are the first since January 2017, when Bahrain [executed](#) three torture victims on spurious charges. There are currently eight men at imminent risk of execution.

In addition to these concerns, we have long been worried about widespread and systematic torture and the role Bahrain’s Ministry of Interior (MoI) plays in abuses. Through an [analysis of hundreds of complaints](#) filed by victims and their families of alleged abuses, we have found that one in every 635 Bahrainis has been arbitrarily detained, disappeared, tortured, raped, killed, or otherwise abused by the police. The MoI itself is directly implicated in 570 cases of torture and 517 cases of arbitrary detention since 2012. Despite this, Bahrain’s oversight bodies, the Ministry Interior Ombudsman and National Institution for Human Rights, have failed or refused to seriously prosecute or investigate nearly all complaints. This failure has contributed to a pervasive impunity in the kingdom’s security forces that rises to the top and includes the Minister of Interior himself, who, due to the widespread and systematic nature of abuses, must be aware of them.

Mr. Cauchard, as you assume your role in Manama, we strongly urge you to use your position to call for investigations into human rights abuses, to visit prisoners, to meet with political opposition activists and human rights defenders, and to seriously raise concerns with your counterparts in the German, British, American, and Italian embassies in Manama, as well as Bahraini officials. We would also remind you of your obligation to the [European Union Guidelines on Human Rights Defenders](#) and we ask you be a leader on this issue. Once again we offer our sincere congratulations on your appointment.

Sincerely,



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