



10 October 2019

Ms. Marisa Kelly  
President of Suffolk University  
Suffolk University  
8 Ashburton Place  
Boston, MA 02108-2770

Dear President Kelly,

We at Americans for Democracy & Human Rights in Bahrain ([ADHRB](http://www.adhrb.org)), a DC-based NGO, write to you to raise our concerns about allegations of gross violations of human rights in Bahrain, overseen by Sheikh Abdullah bin Rashid bin Abdullah AlKhalifa, Bahrain's Ambassador to the United States. Ambassador AlKhalifa [visited](#) Suffolk University earlier this month to discuss US-Bahraini relations, and allegedly [highlighted](#) "respect for religious freedom" in the kingdom – despite Bahrain's [well-documented](#) discrimination against its Shia majority population. We are concerned that his engagement with your prestigious university is an effort to whitewash Bahrain's poor human rights record. We therefore call on Suffolk University to refuse all further visits from Sheikh Abdullah bin Rashid bin Abdullah AlKhalifa.

Ambassador AlKhalifa is a member of Bahrain's AlKhalifa ruling family, son to Minister of Interior Sheikh Rashid bin Abdullah AlKhalifa, who has also been [accused](#) of overseeing human rights abuses in Bahrain. Before his tenure as Ambassador, Sheikh Abdullah bin Rashid bin Abdullah AlKhalifa held multiple positions, including the Governor of Bahrain's Southern Governorate from 2010-2017; President of the Asian Federation of Bodybuilding & Fitness; and Vice President of the International Federation of Bodybuilding & Fitness since 2008. Ambassador AlKhalifa has used these positions to gain prominence while allowing his subordinates to target and arbitrarily detain human rights defenders and subject detainees and prisoners to torture and ill treatment.

While serving as the Governor of Bahrain's Southern Governorate, Ambassador AlKhalifa oversaw some of Bahrain's detention centers, including the East and West Riffa police stations, where activists, journalists, and human rights defenders, including [Nabeel Rajab](#), [Mohammed Ramadan](#), [Nazeera Saeed](#), and [Mahmood Abdulsahab](#) were arbitrarily detained and reported torture, ill treatment, and denial of medical care. The Southern Governorate also has authority over the notorious Jau Prison, which suffers from severe overcrowding and implemented the shackling of prisoners for medical appointments in 2017, which Human Rights Watch has [denounced](#) as inhuman and degrading treatment in violation of international law. Ambassador AlKhalifa also held this position in March 2015, when security forces and prison guards reportedly [used](#) teargas, birdshot, and beatings in response to unrest in the prison. In the weeks following, prisoners [reported](#) collective punishment and rampant torture by the guards, including forcing inmates to sleep in the prison yard for multiple weeks, dousing them with cold water, subjecting them to forced standing and sectarian insults, and depriving them of food and sleep.

In addition to the detention centers and prisons, officials in the Southern Governorate carried out human rights violations at other locations during Ambassador AlKhalifa's tenure as Governor, including at the Bahrain Defence Force (BDF) Hospital. During the 2011 demonstrations, the BDF Hospital was used to abuse, threaten, and intimidate individuals who had been injured in protests and sought medical treatment. Detainees [reported](#) that they were taken to the BDF Hospital but denied medical care, and were instead beaten, handcuffed, blindfolded, and tortured before being transferred to detention centers or prisons. Multiple individuals reported being threatened with sexual assault against themselves and their families, and at least one detainee reported receiving death threats.



Furthermore, Formula One Grand Prix takes place in Sakhir, Bahrain, in the Southern Governorate. Bahraini authorities have violently enforced restrictions on free assembly and targeted peaceful demonstrations. In April 2013, for example, security forces [arrested](#) activists Rihanna al-Mosawi and Nafeesa al-Asfoor on charges of “attempting to plant an explosive device in the Formula 1 racetrack” after they planned to stage a peaceful protest in the area. Both reported that they were threatened and subjected to ill treatment in custody; with al-Mosawi alleging that she was stripped of her clothing and beaten. Both were imprisoned and, although they were ultimately [pardoned](#) in 2015 (al-Asfoor) and 2016 (al-Mosawi), the reports of abuse were never properly investigated by the government. Activists also [routinely accuse](#) the government of using the Formula 1 event as a key means of ‘whitewashing’ Bahrain’s human rights record on the international stage, and [report](#) that human rights abuses actually increase around the event due to crackdowns on protests.

Ambassador AlKhalifa also served as President of the Asian Federation of Bodybuilding & Fitness (AFBF) and Vice President of the International Federation of Bodybuilding & Fitness (IFBF) during 2011, when Bahraini authorities carried out a campaign of reprisals against athletes in Bahrain for their participation in pro-democracy protests. In 2011, Bahraini authorities arrested and reportedly tortured [Tariq Al-Farasani](#), Bahrain and Asia bodybuilding champion. Despite his role as head of these Federations, Sheikh Abdullah did not interfere in the case. Tariq was detained for two months and then [sentenced](#) to one year in prison in the National Safety Court, which used the military judiciary to try civilians who participated in demonstrations.

Ambassador AlKhalifa has used his various positions of power and authority, as well as his status as a member of the ruling family, to protect his subordinates and provide them with impunity for the torture and ill treatment of political prisoners and human rights defenders. This is not the kind of individual that should be welcomed by Suffolk University in any capacity. We therefore call on you, in your position as President of Suffolk University, to refuse all future visits from Sheikh Abdullah bin Rashid bin Abdullah AlKhalifa and all other Bahraini officials who are involved in or oversee human rights abuses.

Sincerely,

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