



18 November 2019

The Honorable Justin Siberell
United States Embassy Manama
Bldg 979, Road 3119, Block 331, Zinj
P.O. Box 26431
Manama, Kingdom of Bahrain

Ambassador Siberell,

Americans for Democracy & Human Rights in Bahrain (ADHRB) writes to express our concern regarding the poor human rights situation in Bahrain and as way of follow up to a letter we sent in September expressing concern over your failure to advance human rights reforms in the kingdom. Previously we wrote to you highlighting the gap between your pledges during your confirmation hearing to raise human rights, and the lack of action on these issues by yourself and the United States (US) embassy. We remain deeply concerned by the US embassy's lack of action on a number of issues, particularly its failure to publicly condemn ongoing religious discrimination and the targeting of Shia clerics and orators during Ashura, and its failure to publicly condemn Bahrain's now-systematic practice of denying unconditional and unfettered healthcare to prisoners in need. We call upon you to fulfill the pledge you made two years ago that you would make human rights a priority, and to publicly voice your concern about these and other issues in Bahrain.

As you are likely aware of Bahrain's longstanding and systematic discrimination against its Shia majority community, and the way this discrimination manifests itself [politically](#), in the [media](#), in school textbooks and class lessons, and through official corruption, crony capitalism, deliberate and uneven development, and wealth disparities, we would like to raise more specific concerns surrounding the suppression of celebrations of the Shia month of Muharram, and Ashura, the tenth day of Muharram. For example, in September 2018, at least 14 Shia clergymen and orators were [harassed](#) by authorities and several were arrested over the content of their sermons in the run-up to Ashura. In addition to clerics, officials arrested several activists, including [AbdulMajeed Abdulla Mohsen](#), a prominent pro-democracy activist, who was held for 15 days on charges of "illegal gathering." This practice has continued in 2019, with numerous clerics arrested ahead of Ashura.

In addition to detaining and arresting clerics and orators, police and riot police have disrupted and dispersed crowds during religious processions commemorating Ashura. Security forces have disrupted processions in the village of Sitra, Muharraq, Isa Town, Bani Jamra, and Duraz, among other towns. In one procession in the Karzakan region, security forces threatened those taking part in the procession to stop, because there were banners in the street criticizing King Hamad. Security forces also threatened to arrest the children of those taking part. In addition to disrupting protests, officials, particularly from the Ministry of Interior (MoI), arrested 15 individuals during Ashura on charges of "indulging in abusive activities to cause chaos." Although members of Bahrain's human rights community stated the individuals were simply painting the name of the king on the ground in a manner that can be perceived as an insult, the MoI alleged the individuals were members of a terrorist organization financed by regional enemies. This pattern continued into 2019 as well, with police cancelling religious ceremonies and prohibiting people from congregating and gathering.



Also among our concerns are consistent and troubling reports from prisoners about the denial of adequate, unfettered, and unconditional medical care. Among those who have been denied medical care are Hassan Mushaima and Dr. Abduljalil AlSingace. Mushaima is one of Bahrain's most prominent political prisoners. He is in his 70s and suffers from numerous medical conditions, including diabetes, erratic blood pressure, and prostate issues, and is in remission for lymphatic cancer. These conditions require that he undergo regular check-ups, including scans to ensure his cancer is still in remission, and receive proper follow-up treatment. However, prison officials are conditioning these procedures upon his agreement to go to the prison clinic in shackles and in his prison uniform. Mushaima refuses to be subjected to such inhumane treatment, as the practice is unnecessary and solely designed to degrade and humiliate him. While he has, upon infrequent occasions, been allowed to go to the clinic, these visits are rare and rarely result in further medical access.

Dr. Abduljalil AlSingace similarly has been denied adequate care. He is a prominent and deeply respected human rights defender and political activist. He suffers the effects of childhood polio and has sickle-cell anemia, with symptoms including chronic pain, numbness of extremities, and shortness of breath. His condition has deteriorated in prison due to the torture during his initial detention, and the prison administration's refusal to provide him with adequate medical care.

Due to the long-term effects of polio, Dr. AlSingace must use a wheelchair or crutches to move around. However, prison officials have, in the past, withheld his medication and prescription medical devices, particularly the rubber padding for his crutches. Furthermore, as with Mushaima, prison administrators have [refused](#) Dr. AlSingace's requests for check-ups and clinic visits unless he consents to wear the prison uniform or shackles. As a result, he has been denied necessary appointments with a heart specialist as well as requests for medical attention for neck and back pain.

Ambassador, we understand these issues to be extraordinarily serious and of tremendous importance to the United States. It is not only longstanding policy to promote religious freedom, but a particularly important one for the current presidential administration. We thus see it as critical that you raise your voice as the representative of the United States in Bahrain in support of the right to all people to freely practice their religions. In addition, we are deeply concerned over the health of Hassan Mushaima and Dr. Abduljalil AlSingace, especially as their situations are preventable, if the government took the correct steps. Therefore, we urge you to personally intervene on their behalf with the relevant authorities. The conditions that the government is placing on them before they can get the assistance they need are solely designed to humiliate them; they play no other purpose. Your intervention can make the difference between life threatening complications or securing the health care they need. More broadly, we strongly request that you take steps to place human rights more centrally in your actions and in the work of the embassy, as you pledged over two years ago. The United States can remain a force for good in the region only if it continues to stand up for the human rights of all and the failure to do so jeopardizes the US' and Bahrain's long-term security.

Sincerely,

Husain Abdulla
Executive Director