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His Excellency Mr. Jérôme Cauchard,
French Ambassador in the Kingdom of Bahrain,
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Paris, 12 May 2021

Your Excellency the Ambassador,

I was alerted several times by the association Americans for Democracy and Human Rights in Bahrain (ADHRB) of the conditions of detention of political prisoners in Bahrain. To that end, I wrote two letters to Mister Jean-Yves Le Drian, Minister of Europe and Foreign Affairs, on the detention conditions of women and on those condemned to the death penalty in the country. The Minister responded to me on the 5th of January 2021 that France was “concerned about the arrest of political opponents, conditions of detention and the resumption of capital executions” and that it was regularly sending messages in favour of the respect of human rights.

However, today, we know that these different calls from France for the respect of these rights are not heard by the Bahraini authorities, and the COVID-19 crisis unequivocally shows it to us.

Also, Mister the Ambassador, I wanted to bring your attention to a particular point, as it seems that the conditions of detention in the midst of this global pandemic are deplorable, and the Bahraini authorities are not fulfilling their obligation of providing medical care to detainees and respecting elementary sanitary protocols.

I was informed that the number of political prisoners infected by COVID-19 was far higher than the Bahraini government claimed. The families of these prisoners infected with COVID-19 testify of the conditions of detention, that are more arbitrary than observing the sanitary protocols : isolation of the prisoners in their cells 24 hours a day, a single meal per day, often served late at night (hence sleeping prisoners did not have receive a single meal), refusal of required medical treatments.

The authorities are notably very obscure about the situation of Jaw Prison, but reports of non-governmental organisations and UN experts demonstrate the inhumane conditions and the violations of international instruments, mainly emanating from the UN, notably relating to torture, political rights (as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights), and to conditions of detention, as pursuant to the *Nelson Mandela*

Rules. Family members are also facing legal action for having legitimately and peacefully asked for a reaction from the authorities about the propagation of the virus in the prison.

It was also reported to me that on April 17th, the security officials of the Jaw prison reportedly assaulted several political prisoners who were protesting about the way they were treated, the lack of medical care provided after the COVID-19 outbreak, conditions of detention and the death of Abbas Malallah.

Mister Sayed Ahmed Al-Wadaei, Advocacy Director at Bahrain Institute for Rights and Democracy, declared that dozens of political prisoners had been badly injured during the attacks perpetrated by prison officers and that traces of blood were still visible after the assault. Several detainees were reportedly seriously injured, others were transferred without any possibility to locate them, and others reported threats of torture if they continued their protests.

On April 10th, 166 prisoners were released from Jaw after the discovery of a COVID outbreak. Those prisoners have been put under electronic surveillance. Political prisoners should have been released without any conditions.

That particular point leads me to share another concern: alternative sentencing in Bahrain. To diminish the number of prisoners, the government started to apply alternative sentences in 2017, an initiative that you supported in March 2021.

While those alternative sentences are, on paper, an efficient tool to respond to international criticism, it seems that they are inappropriate, especially when applied to political opponents.

Even though those sentences allow political prisoners to leave prison, they are not able to fully enjoy the freedom they deserve. Alternative sentences do not answer the problem of arbitrary arrests of political opposition that are often engaged in a movement to promote their most basic rights. These alternative sentences give a sense of freedom, but for instance Mr. Nabeel Rajab, a political prisoner released from prison in June 2020 under these sentences, is coerced into self-censorship in order to avoid a more dire sentence or being sent back to prison.

France must have a real dialogue with Bahraini authorities, and this dialogue has to be locally addressed. To that end, Your Excellency, I would like to know if you have been able to peacefully but firmly discuss with local authorities regarding the conditions of detention of prisoners during the pandemic. I would also like to know whether you have been able to retrieve information regarding the events of April 17th, 2021 in Jaw Prison during your recent visit to the new Building 21 under the invitation of the Ministry of Interior. I am particularly worried about the different reports relating to the disappearances of 70 prisoners since that date.

I thank you for kindly providing a follow-up to this letter.

Sincerely,

Frédérique Dumas
MP of the Hauts-de-Seine

Co-signatories:

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