



8 February 2021

## **Bahrain: Joint Letter to EU Ahead of Meeting with Bahraini Delegation**

**Re: EU-Bahrain Cooperation Agreement Must Depend on Human Rights Improvements**

**To the attn of:**

**Mr Josep Borrell**, High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/ Vice-President of the European Commission

**Mr Eamon Gilmore**, EU Special Representative for Human Rights

Your Excellencies,

In light of the meeting between Bahrain's Minister of Foreign Affairs and the European Union scheduled to take place in Brussels on 10 February 2021, we are writing to raise concerns about the deterioration of the human rights situation in Bahrain, following a year in which Human Rights Watch [reports](#) that the Bahraini government has "escalated repression" against critics.

As the informal EU-Bahrain Human Rights Dialogue originally scheduled for November 2020 has been indefinitely postponed, it is vital that human rights concerns are placed at the centre of your conversations with Bahraini officials during this upcoming meeting.

### **Bahrain's Crackdown on Political Opposition and Civil Society**

Bahrain's February 2011 Arab Spring uprising was an event which many hoped would herald a new era of democracy in the country. However, since the government's [violent suppression](#) of the protests, promised reforms have failed to materialise. The leaders of the protest movement, some of them now elderly, continue to languish in prison.

Since 2017, authorities have [outlawed](#) all independent media and dissolved all political opposition parties. Among the most prominent prisoners currently incarcerated are high-profile political

opposition leaders, activists, bloggers and human rights defenders [sentenced](#) to life imprisonment for their roles in the 2011 pro-democracy protests. These include **Hassan Mushaima, Abduljalil AlSingace, Abdulhadi AlKhawaja, Sheikh Mohammed Habib AlMuqdad and Abdulwahab Husain**. In 2018, the leader of Bahrain's largest opposition bloc, **Sheikh Ali Salman**, was [sentenced](#) to life in prison following trials on speech charges and spurious accusations of espionage.

Over the last four years, political activists have borne the full brunt of political repression in Bahrain, facing arbitrary arrest and lengthy prison terms, and in some cases torture, for opposing the government. Hundreds have been arbitrarily [stripped](#) of citizenship, while activists and journalists who continue their work from exile risk [reprisals](#) against family members who remain in the country.

According to the Committee to Protect Journalists, at least [six](#) journalists are currently [imprisoned](#) for their work in Bahrain, while the country has fallen to a lamentable 169/180 on the Reporters Without Borders [2020 World Press Freedom Index](#). Bahrain [scored](#) a paltry 1/40 for political rights in Freedom House's Freedom in the World 2020 report.

In addition, Bahrain's government has increasingly [turned to](#) repressive cybercrime legislation to further restrict civic space, with prominent [defence lawyers](#), [opposition leaders](#) and [human rights defenders](#) prosecuted over their social media activity since 2018. As Amnesty International has [reported](#), Bahrain's authorities have used the COVID-19 pandemic as a pretext "to further crush freedom of expression."

### **Medical Negligence and Mistreatment in Jau Prison**

Bahrain's prisons [remain](#) overcrowded and unsanitary, and human rights groups have [called](#) on the government to release those imprisoned solely for exercising their right to freedom of expression in light of the threat posed by COVID-19. Prisoners are [frequently](#) subjected to humiliating treatment and denied adequate medical care, in violation of Bahrain's international human rights obligations. These include **Hassan Mushaima** and **Dr Abduljalil AlSingace**, who suffer from a range of chronic medical conditions, as well as human rights activists **Ali AlHajee** and **Naji Fateel**.

Other prominent prisoners include two European-Bahraini dual citizens, the **Danish-Bahraini Abdulhadi AlKhawaja** and the **Swedish-Bahraini Sheikh Mohammed Habib AlMuqdad**, both of whom are considered prisoners of conscience by Amnesty International, having been prosecuted and sentenced to life imprisonment for peacefully exercising their right to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly, and subjected to torture and other ill-treatment including denial of medical care.

In April 2011, security forces violently arrested **Al-Khawaja** and broke his jaw, leading to surgery for four broken bones in his face. Security officers tortured Al-Khawaja directly after his major jaw surgery, while blindfolded and restrained to a military hospital bed, which forced the doctor to ask the security officers to stop as it would undo the surgical work. Almost ten years later [he still suffers](#) from chronic pain and requires additional surgery to remove the metal plates and screws that were used to reattach his jaw.

**AlMuqdad**, who was tortured by methods including severe beating and electrocution, suffers from multiple health problems, including a hernia likely caused by his torture, but is being denied proper health care. As of January 2021, in addition to the need for urgent surgery to repair the hernia, AlMuqdad is in need of heart surgery to unblock his coronary arteries and examination by a urologist to diagnose a prostate problem. The prison administration continues to delay the surgeries and specialist appointments, blaming the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

## Death Penalty and Arbitrary Killings

In 2017, Bahrain abandoned a *de facto* moratorium on the death penalty and has since conducted six executions, five of which were condemned as arbitrary by UN Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial executions Agnes Callamard, in [2017](#) and [2019](#) respectively. According to recent research by the Bahrain Institute for Rights and Democracy (BIRD) and Reprieve, 26 death row inmates currently face imminent execution in the country, nearly half of whom were convicted on the basis of confessions allegedly extracted under torture in cases related to political unrest.

These include **Mohammed Ramadhan** and **Husain Moosa**, whose death sentences were [upheld](#) in July 2020 despite credible evidence that both men were convicted on the basis of confessions obtained under torture. Independent experts at the International Committee for the Rehabilitation of Torture Victims concluded that [investigations](#) by Bahrain's human rights oversight bodies into the torture of the two men "fail[ed] to meet the minimum professional standards and the minimum international legal standards", while the Bar Human Rights Council of England and Wales [warned](#) that "upholding the convictions would be wholly inconsistent with Bahrain's international obligations". Both men are at risk of imminent execution. Three UN human rights experts [warned](#) on 12 February 2020 that carrying out these death sentences would constitute an arbitrary killing.

## Our Requests

Bahraini authorities have engaged in widespread violations of human rights enshrined in both Bahrain's national legal system as well as in multiple international human rights treaties to which Bahrain is a state party.

Furthermore, a prevailing culture of impunity has allowed suspected perpetrators of serious human rights violations to avoid accountability. In light of the continued deterioration of the human rights situation in Bahrain, we therefore ask that during the meeting the EEAS:

- Urges the unconditional and immediate release of all those imprisoned solely for peacefully exercising their right to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association, including Hassan Mushaima, Abduljalil AlSingace, Abdulwahab Husain and Sheikh Ali Salman;
- Urges for the unconditional and immediate release of Danish-Bahraini Abdulhadi AlKhwaja and Swedish-Bahraini Sheikh AlMuqdad;
- Calls for an independent review of the cases involving those facing the death penalty, including the cases of Mohammed Ramadhan and Husain Moosa; as well as for the ultimate revocation of their death sentences;
- Urges Bahraini authorities to reinstate a moratorium on the death penalty;
- Pressures Bahrain to end the use of torture and other -ill-treatment and to tackle the culture of impunity by holding suspected perpetrators accountable and ensuring effective mechanisms for victims to receive justice and restitution;
- Urges Bahrain to rescind its arbitrary bans on opposition parties, civil society groups and independent media and encourage the development of civic space in Bahrain;
- Urges the Bahraini Government to ensure its respect to, and protection of, the right to freedom of expression, and to take necessary steps to ensure freedom of the press; and

- Persuades Bahrain's government to take concrete and measurable steps towards justice reform and respect for human rights.

Sincerely,

1. Americans for Democracy & Human Rights in Bahrain (ADHRB)
2. Amnesty International
3. Arab Organisation for Human Rights in the UK
4. ARTICLE 19
5. Bahrain Institute for Rights and Democracy (BIRD)
6. CIVICUS
7. Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ)
8. Democracy for the Arab World Now (DAWN)
9. European Centre for Democracy and Human Rights (ECDHR)
10. Freedom House
11. Global Legal Action Network (GLAN)
12. Gulf Centre for Human Rights (GCHR)
13. Human Rights Watch (HRW)
14. Index on Censorship
15. International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH)
16. International Service for Human Rights (ISHR)
17. PEN International
18. Reporters Without Borders (RSF)
19. Reprieve
20. World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT)