



Brussels, 26 June 2013

JOINT STATEMENT

EU should call for the release of human rights defenders and peaceful protest leaders in Bahrain in the context of EU-GCC ministerial meeting in Manama

A year ago, on 25 June 2012, the EU adopted its Strategic Framework on Human Rights and Democracy, in which it pledged to “place human rights at the centre of its relations with all third countries, including its strategic partners” and “to throw its full weight behind advocates of liberty, democracy, and human rights throughout the world.”

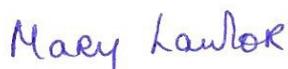
The undersigned organisations deplore that the EU has failed to make explicit calls for the immediate and unconditional release of the human rights defenders, Twitter activists and bloggers, and leaders of peaceful protests – several of those hold EU citizenship – who have been jailed in recent months in Bahrain solely for peacefully exercising and promoting human rights. They call on the EU to turn the abovementioned important pledges into concrete action. The EU should act in line with the European Parliament resolution of 17 January 2013 on the human rights situation in Bahrain which called on the EU Member States and the EU High Representative to “actively push for the release of the imprisoned activists” and in this connection “to ensure the adoption of Foreign Affairs Council conclusions on the human rights situation in Bahrain, which should include a specific call for the immediate and unconditional release of the imprisoned activists.”

The continued systematic crackdown by the authorities in Bahrain on human rights defenders and peaceful opposition activists has dramatically worsened in the last two years. Since the eruption of protests in February 2011, the Bahraini authorities responded with harsh measures against protesters, civil society leaders, human rights defenders and pro-democracy activists. In the first half of 2013 alone, several cases have been reported to the international mechanisms including the UN system that include arrests, detention, ill-treatment, unfair trials, and physical attacks on human rights defenders and activists. The undersigned organisations would specifically like to highlight the cases of human rights defenders Naji Fateel, Zainab Al-Khawaja, Nabeel Rajab, and Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja.

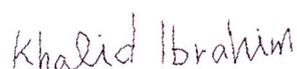
The Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry (BICI) in its November 2011 report concluded that the abuses during the arrests “could not have happened without the knowledge of higher echelons of the command structure” of the security forces. The government has so far failed to implement the key recommendations of the BICI, and has not brought to justice anyone responsible for abuses at any rank in the chain of command or independently investigated all deaths of protesters and allegations of torture.

The government of Bahrain accepted either fully or partially, 156 of 176 recommendations during its recent Universal Periodic Review, but for the most part it has denied that human rights violations have occurred and has avoided putting its commitments into practice. Instead the government continues to suppress freedom of expression, assembly and association and harass, imprison and detain opposition activists, peaceful demonstrators, and human rights defenders for peacefully exercising their rights

We, the undersigned organisations urge the EU High Representative, and EU Member States to collectively and publicly insist that Bahrain release those currently detained and imprisoned for peacefully exercising their rights, including those holding EU citizenship, ahead of the EU-Gulf Cooperation Council ministerial meeting of 30 June in Bahrain, and that they use that meeting to further drive home their message and pursue releases.



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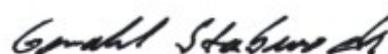
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