

Sheikh Hamad bin Issa Al-Khalifa  
King of Bahrain  
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Brussels, 21 January 2009

Your Excellency Sheikh Hamad bin Issa Al-Khalifa,

On behalf of International Partnership for Human Rights (IPHR), a Brussels-based human rights organization, I would like to express my concern at the recent defamation campaign conducted by the government-owned media against leading human rights defenders in Bahrain and the detention of some twenty defenders on 15 December 2008 for allegedly being part of a "terror plot", according to information from the Observatory for Human Rights Defenders.

Among those arrested are: Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja, former President of the BCHR and Protection Coordinator at Frontline; Ali Mushaima, a former leading member of the Unemployed Committee living in the United Kingdom as political refugee; Abdulraoof Al-Shayeb, former President of the National Committee for Martyrs and Victims of Torture living in the United Kingdom as political refugee; Hasan Mushaima, Secretary General of the political party Haq Movement of Civil Liberties and Democracy; Dr. Abduljalil Alsingace, Head of the Human Rights Unit of Haq Movement of Civil Liberties and Democracy; Mohamed Habib Al-Meqdad, a religious scholar; and Ali Ahmed, an activist. According to information available to us, Mr. Al-Khawaja, was released on bail on 9 January 2009 but ordered not to change his address. We know him personally from his participation in events co-organized by IPHR and the foundation Bridging the Gulf, for members of civil society from the Gulf region in Brussels and The Hague in October 2008, and respect him as a genuine and a sincere colleague. The current whereabouts of the other detainees are not known to IPHR.

On the basis of information available to us, we believe that the detention of the above-mentioned activists were arbitrary and appeared to merely aim at punishing them because of their human rights activities.

Moreover, we ask you to order a thorough and impartial investigation into the alleged acts of torture and ill-treatment committed against at least some of the detainees, and, should these allegations turn out to be true, bring those responsible before a competent and impartial tribunal and punish them.

We wish to recall you of the provisions of the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, adopted by the UN General Assembly on 9 December 1998, which are morally binding also to Bahrain as an UN member state. Its article 1 provides that "everyone has the right, individually and in association with others, to promote and to strive for the protection and realisation of human rights and fundamental freedoms at the national and international levels."

Finally, we ask you to do all in your power to put an end to all forms of harassment against all human rights defenders in your country, including defamation campaigns in government-owned media, and to make publicly clear that the right to defend human rights is a fundamental right that must be respected in Bahrain.

Yours respectfully,

Brigitte Dufour

Director

cc. Embassy of the Kingdom of Bahrain in Brussels  
Sheikh Khaled Bin Ahmad Al-Khalifa, Minister of Foreign Affairs  
Sheikh Khalid bin Ali Al Khalifa, Minister of Justice and Islamic Affairs  
Permanent Mission of Bahrain to the United Nations in Geneva  
UN Special Representative on Human Rights Defenders  
European Commission  
European Parliament