



20 April 2017

To: Sheikh Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa
King of Bahrain

CC :

Hon. Zeid Ra'ad Zeid al-Hussein
High Commissioner for Human Rights

Ms. Frederica Mogherini
High Representative of the European Union
for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy

Mr. Sigmar Gabriel
Vice-Chancellor and Foreign Minister of the
Federal Republic of Germany

Mr. Rex W. Tillerson
United States Secretary of State

The Right Honorable Boris Johnson
Foreign & Commonwealth Office of the
United Kingdom

Mr. Jean-Marc Ayrault
Minister of Foreign Affairs of France

King Hamad,

We, the undersigned, express our deep concern with the Government of Bahrain's continued targeting of journalists, which further restricts free press and expression in the country. On 23 April 2017, the court of appeals will hold another hearing for Sayed Ahmed Salman al-Mousawi, an internationally-renowned photographer, after he was arrested more than three years ago for alleged terrorist activities. The government's repeated harassment of al-Mousawi and other journalists highlight the ongoing censorship and restrictions on free press and expression in Bahrain.

Sayed Ahmed Salman al-Mousawi is a 29-year-old freelance photographer who has won 169 international photography prizes—a number of which he even won while in detention. He is a member of FIAP, PSA, UPI, and Qatif photos.

Authorities arrested al-Mousawi, along with his brother Sayed Mohammed, on 10 February 2014 from their home in Duraz. The plain-clothes masked policemen did not present any arrest warrant and confiscated his cameras and electronic devices. After holding al-Mousawi for six days, officials transferred him to Dry Dock prison. Security forces then took him to the Criminal Investigations Directorate (CID) for another six days where they tortured him “cruelly without mercy,” as he later told his father. Security officers hung him on a door four times, electrocuted him, and did not allow him to sit for four days. They stripped him naked, beat him and sexually assaulted him. No independent investigation into his torture allegations have ever been conducted.

Al-Mousawi spent over nine months in detention without official charges against him. At his first trial on 24 December 2014, the prosecutor charged him with forming and participating in a terror cell, accusing him of providing SIM cards to protesters—“terrorists”—and taking photos of anti-government demonstrations. He and other witnesses denied that he had anything to do with the riots. Over the course of 2015, officials postponed his trial six times. Meanwhile, the government continued to deny him his basic human rights, including restricting access to a lawyer, placing him in solitary confinement, and denying family visits.

On 23 November 2015, the Bahraini court sentenced al-Mousawi to 10 years imprisonment and revoked his citizenship. However, the Court of Cassation overturned the ruling earlier this year. His postponed appeal hearing next month provides an opportunity to end his prolonged arbitrary detention and mistreatment. Al-Mousawi has now been held arbitrarily for over three years, merely for exercising his right to free expression.

Al-Mousawi’s case is representative of the Bahraini government’s growing repression against basic civil rights. We, the undersigned, have raised our concern over numerous cases of torture, arbitrary detention, unfair trials, and trumped up terrorism charges used to restrict expression unfavorable to the government. Journalists, bloggers, online activists and human rights defenders such as [Faisal Hayyat](#), [Nazeeha Saeed](#), and [Nabeel Rajab](#), among [others](#), have increasingly come under attack by authorities since the 2011 pro-democracy protests. Arbitrary arrests of journalists, systematic torture and impunity have turned Bahrain into a dangerous country for those who speak out. The country is ranked 162nd out of 180 countries in Reporters Without Borders’ (RSF) 2016 World Press Freedom Index and has become one of the biggest detainers for journalists and bloggers with at least 14 behind bars as of today.

Furthermore, the government has also censored and restricted the media, most recently in January, temporarily [suspending](#) the online version of *Alwasat*, the only independent newspaper in the country. Through a combination of media and counterterrorism legislation, as well as excessive government oversight, to justify their actions against the press and journalists, Bahraini officials continue to act with impunity.

The targeting and judicial harassment of journalists simply performing their work is unacceptable and violates international human rights standards. Bahrain is a signatory to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which states in Article 19 that “Everyone shall have the right to freedom of expression.” This [includes](#) the requirement that “a free press and other media [be] able to comment on public issues without censorship or restraint

and to inform public opinion.” The pattern of reprisals and suppression of freedom of express far exceeds the limited restrictions placed on this right under article 19.3.

We, the undersigned, raise our concerns about restrictions on free press and expression in Bahrain, and call on the Bahraini government to:

- Immediately and unconditionally release Sayed Ahmed Salman al-Mousawi and all other journalists arrested and imprisoned for merely exercising their right to free expression;
- Guarantee the right to free expression by removing restrictions on the media and peaceful dissent, and foster an independent free press to fulfill Bahrain’s international human rights obligations.

Signed,

ActiveWatch (Romania)
Africa Freedom of Information Centre
Americans for Democracy & Human Rights in Bahrain (ADHRB)
Article 19
Bahrain Institute for Rights and Democracy (BIRD)
Bytes for All, Pakistan
Canadian Journalists for Free Expression
European Center for Democracy and Human Rights
Freedom House
Gulf Center for Human Rights
Index on Censorship
Journaliste en Danger (JED)
Maharat Foundation
Media Foundation for West Africa
Reporters Without Borders (RSF)
World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers