



## Joint Statement by Trade Unions on Bahrain and the UK

We the undersigned are appalled about the deteriorating human rights situation in Bahrain, and call upon the UK government to take immediate practical steps to end the suffering of civilians there. We call on the UK opposition parties to make the same commitment.

Human rights abuses in Bahrain remain widespread and systematic. Since the beginning of the crackdown in 2011, over 130 individuals have been killed and over 3500 individuals have been arbitrarily detained. Not only are public protests banned indefinitely, but opposition leaders and human rights activists continue to be imprisoned on arbitrary and ambiguous grounds. Press freedom is severely limited, and journalists face regular reprisals including arbitrary arrests and torture. This year Reporters Without Borders downgraded Bahrain to the same category as Syria in its World Press Freedom Index.

In 2015, the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention reported that the use of torture and arbitrary detention is a systematic problem in Bahrain. According to Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, such torture and mistreatment of detainees includes regular beatings, humiliation and withholding of food and medication. The government has even entrenched repression within the law with increased penalties for those who “insult” the king and banning protests. We condemn such human rights abuses in Bahrain.

Trade union activists in Bahrain face mass dismissal, arbitrary arrest and torture for their work. In the case of the Bahrain Association of Teachers, the president Mahdi Abu Dheeb was tried in an unfair military court and sentenced to ten years imprisonment for “inciting crimes such as calling for teachers’ sit-ins”. During this time, Abu Dheeb went on hunger strike on two occasions to protest against the use of torture against detainees, having himself suffered from broken ribs and kidney damage as a result of regular beatings. As providing medical treatment to protesters is considered a crime, the head of the Bahrain Nursing society Rula Al Saffar was also detained, interrogated and tortured for her work during the 2011 protests. This involved guards shocking her with stun guns, beating her, forcibly chopping off her hair, and threatening to rape her.

We are moreover appalled by reports that hundreds of students and minors continue to be detained in Bahrain on charges related to non-violent freedom of expression and assembly. Many of these students and minors have suffered varying forms of physical and psychological torture and some have even had their citizenship revoked. We call on the

government to press Bahrain to release all students and allow them immediate re-entry into schools and universities, and to push for the restoration of citizenships arbitrarily revoked.

Bahrain continues to receive support from the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office, with the budget for assistance rising in 2015 from £1.5M in 2014 to £2.1M in 2015. We are shocked that there has been no independent assessment made for this spending of public money despite a clear deterioration in Bahrain's human rights record. We call on such an assessment to be made and for the FCO to take on a more critical stance against violations of basic rights. In 2014, three years following the start of the FCO's assistance programme, the Foreign Affairs Committee argued that it has seen no evidence of Bahrain implementing political reforms or safeguarding human rights and that the FCO "should have bitten the bullet and designated Bahrain as a country of concern". We believe transparency with this assistance is vital and that any relationship held with the government of Bahrain be used to rectify the human rights and political situation.

Finally, we call on the UK government to take serious practical measures to ensure that the human rights situation in Bahrain is finally tackled and that any military, diplomatic and security ties are handled with the view of ending human rights abuses.

**Bakers, Food and Allied Workers Union (BFAWU)**

**Communication Workers Union (CWU)**

**Education International (EI)**

**GMB**

**National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers (RMT)**

**National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers (NASUWT)**

**National Union of Journalists (NUJ)**

**National Union of Teachers (NUT)**

**Public and Commercial Services Union (PCS)**

**Royal College of Nursing (RCN)**

**Trade Union Congress (TUC)**

**Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers (USDAW)**

**UNITE the Union**

**University College Union (UCU)**

**UNISON**