



Attention MFA Didier Burkhalter

Excellency,

We, the undersigned, write to you concerning Switzerland's hosting of the King of Bahrain and his state delegation on Thursday 12 May. Bahrain continues to severely restrict the rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly; torture remains systematic; use of the death penalty has increase; and the state is arbitrarily rendering activists and juveniles stateless.

We therefore urge you in the strongest terms to make human rights a key part of your meetings with King Hamad and the Bahrain delegation this week, to call for the release from prison of Zainab Al-Khawaja and of all human rights defenders; the pardoning of torture victims on death row; and to reinstate the arms ban against Bahrain.

Major human rights violations continue to occur in Bahrain. Key among these is the continued suppression of speech through unfair trials: new laws include prison sentences of up to seven years and a 10,000 dinar (25,700 CHF) fine for '[insulting the King](#)'. Zainab Al-Khawaja is a human rights defender currently [serving](#) a 37 month prison sentence on a litany of charges, two of which relate to her tearing an image of the King. Last month, on the occasion of a visit by the US Secretary of State, Bahrain's foreign minister promised she would soon be released. A month later, Zainab is still [waiting](#).

She is not alone: human rights defender and president of the Bahrain Center for Human Rights Nabeel Rajab was [imprisoned](#) on speech-related offences in 2015. His ability to work and speak out has been curtailed significantly since his last release from prison, with police holding charges which may be brought against him at any time. In the last twelve months, the leaders of three opposition political societies ([Al-Wefaq](#), [Wa'ad](#), and [Al-Wahdawi](#)) were prosecuted and imprisoned, all on speech-related charges. The Bahrain 13, a group of human rights defenders and political opposition leaders first sentenced by military court in 2011, [continue](#) to serve prison sentences on charges related to their speech, association and assembly. Since 2012, Bahrain has [revoked](#) the citizenship of over 260 people, leaving many stateless. Among them are human rights defenders, journalists, political activists, civil society members, and persons tried in unfair courts, including at least 11 [juveniles](#).

Two death row inmates have exhausted all legal avenues of appeal: Mohammad Ramadan and Husain Moosa, sentenced for the 2014 killing of a police officer, both allege torture and ill-treatment. According to Ramadan's [lawyer](#) and [family](#), police tortured him. Police officers told him they knew he was not responsible, but deserved the punishment he would get.

All these violations continue five years on from the Arab Spring, which [saw](#) extrajudicial killings of protestors, systematic torture, unfair trials, and unprecedented suppressions of the political, civil and human rights of Bahraini citizens. In November 2011, King Hamad [announced](#) a reform programme to set right those wrongs, and promised to “reform our laws so that they are consistent with international standards to which Bahrain is committed by treaties.”

Yet in the intervening years, human rights violating practices have been institutionalised: torture continues [systematically](#) and evidence extracted under torture is commonly used to sentence individuals, as in the case of Mohammad Ramadan and Husain Moosa. The prosecutions of Zainab Al-Khawaja and other human rights defenders and activists shows that freedom of expression is considered a threat to the establishment. At least ten people are currently on death row, all of them sentenced in the last two years, and with serious concerns over the fairness of their trials. New mechanisms established since 2011, often pointed to as markers of reform, have been [exposed](#) as non-independent and do not resolve these issues.

We regret the Swiss government’s recent decision to authorise arms sales valued at [185 million francs](#) to Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and the UAE after a year-long arms suspension first instated at the onset of Saudi Arabia’s war in Yemen. We urge you to reinstate the arms ban against Bahrain, until such a time when Bahrain’s human rights responsibilities, as set out by its UN Universal Periodic Review in 2012 and the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry in 2011, are fully implemented. Bahrain’s human rights violations may extend beyond its own borders, to the frontiers of Yemen. Saudi Arabia is accused of committing potential [war crimes](#) in Yemen and exacerbating a humanitarian crisis. Bahrain’s direct involvement in the military campaigns makes it a participant in these crimes. Switzerland places its own reputation on the line, should Swiss-manufactured military equipment end up employed in the bombing of Yemen.

We, the undersigned NGOs, have long appreciated Switzerland’s role in leading all five joint-statements on Bahrain made at the UN Human Rights Council since 2011, most recently in September 2015. It is with your state’s past work on human rights in the country in mind that we draw alarm to last month’s partial resumption of arms sales to the Gulf monarchies and this week’s historic meeting between the Federal Council’s and King Hamad. We therefore urge you to call for the release of Zainab Al-Khawaja and all human rights defender and the pardoning of torture victims on death row in your meetings with the King of Bahrain, and for the reinstatement of the arms ban against Bahrain.

We enclose a letter by Zainab Al-Khawaja, which she wrote in prison.

Yours sincerely,

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