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13 October 2017

Dear Jerry DeMuro,

We write to you ahead of the Bahrain International Defence Exhibition and Conference (BIDEC) urging that BAE Systems not take part in this event, and that it refrain from advertising or selling its products to the Bahrain Defence Force until the Kingdom of Bahrain ends its involvement in the Saudi-led intervention in Yemen, and adopts stronger, legally enforceable guarantees that any military equipment it purchases will not be used to undermine Bahraini citizens' basic human rights.

The Bahrain Defence Force is engaged in a military conflict in Yemen that has killed [more than 10,000 civilians](#) and wounded 40,000 others since 2015. It is part of the Saudi-led coalition which is implicated in war crimes abroad. Meanwhile, the Bahraini government represses its citizens at home. Bahraini police violently put down the Kingdom's pro-democracy movement in 2011 and continue to use excessive force to suppress basic human rights. Authorities have imprisoned human rights campaigners, continue to practice torture, and ruthlessly shut down opposition political parties and independent newspapers. No genuine oversight mechanisms exist to hold them accountable.

In view of these abuses, we call on you to exercise due diligence in line with your human rights responsibilities, and consequently withdraw from BIDEC. Participation in the conference will endorse and embolden the Bahraini government's systematic violation of human rights.

### **The Bahrain Defence Force and the Yemen War**

Bahrain is a member of the Saudi-led coalition that has conducted joint military operations in Yemen since March 2015. On 6 October 2017, the UN [blacklisted](#) the coalition after reporting that its airstrikes have killed or injured 683 children. The same report revealed that the coalition conducted 38 verified attacks on Yemeni schools and hospitals in 2016. In January 2017, the UN Security Council received reports that such attacks "may amount to war crimes."

The military technology and equipment that is sold to Bahrain at the BIDEC arms fair may be used to commit further atrocities in the Yemen conflict. In the United States, news of President Trump's [planned sale](#) of 19 F-16 aircraft to the Kingdom of Bahrain is especially concerning,

given previous reports that a Bahraini Defence Force's F-16 jet [crashed](#) in Saudi Arabia while conducting an air strike in Yemen. The BIDEC [website](#) states that the Bahrain Defence Force is "currently upgrading their capabilities and systems" in order to encourage suppliers to participate. Those who provide these upgrades, however, are providing technology that may be used in war crimes in Yemen.

Furthermore, the Bahrain Defence Force is a highly [sectarian organisation](#), which virtually excludes Shia Muslims - who constitute the majority of Bahrain's citizen population - and promotes anti-Shia extremism. There is extensive [evidence](#) that the Bahraini armed forces have particularly sought to recruit Sunni foreign nationals since a purge of Shia military personnel in the 1990s, and this practice has reportedly intensified in the years since 2011. Likewise, there is evidence that Bahrain security officials [disseminate hate speech](#) and extremist materials among the ranks, leading human rights defender Nabeel Rajab to warn that these institutions may serve as an "ideological incubator" for officers that have defected to join terror groups like ISIS. While peaceful activist like Rajab have since been prosecuted and imprisoned for comments like these, [more than 100 Bahrainis](#) have left the kingdom to fight with ISIS, among them former members of Bahrain's security forces.

### **Crackdown on Human Rights since June 2016 and Police Brutality**

Over the last 18 months, an orchestrated crackdown on the rights to free expression, assembly and association has severely undermined the prospects for a political solution to Bahrain's domestic unrest. The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights in September 2017 [condemned](#) Bahrain for increasing its use of torture and shutting down democratic space in the country. In July 2017, Rajab, the country's most celebrated human rights defender, was sentenced to two years in prison for speaking to journalists, and [faces](#) up to 15 years' imprisonment in other trials related solely to his freedom of expression; two of these charges directly relate to his criticism of the humanitarian cost of the war in Yemen. Bahrain's two major opposition parties were [dissolved](#) by government order, and the only independent newspaper was [forcibly closed](#). Three torture victims were illegally [executed](#) in January 2017, and military courts have since been [empowered](#) to try civilians. The government even reversed what few reforms it had previously made, restoring law enforcement authority to the National Security Agency – Bahrain's infamous secret police force implicated in widespread torture and extrajudicial killing in 2011. Immediately following its re-empowerment, the National Security Agency resumed its abusive practices and began systematically targeting civil society activists. It has arrested, tortured and sexually abused detainees, including woman human rights defender [Ebtisam Al-Sayegh](#).

As a result, in September 2017, the UN Assistant Secretary General for Human Rights, Andrew Gilmour, presented a [report](#) that the Kingdom of Bahrain has engaged in an "ongoing trend of major harassment and intimidation against human rights defenders," creating "an atmosphere of fear" since its campaign of reprisals began in June 2016.

Bahrain saw its bloodiest day in years on 23 May 2017, when security forces moved into the village of Diraz and [used lethal force](#) to disperse a peaceful sit-in around the home of a leading

Shia cleric, killing five people and arresting nearly 300. Five UN human rights experts have [described](#) these killings as “unlawful.” Such abuse of power is not isolated. One protester, Mustafa Hamdan, [was killed](#) after being shot by live ammunition in the back of his head during an earlier raid on Diraz in January 2017; no branch of the security forces has been held accountable. Meanwhile, torture and ill-treatment continue to be reported to NGOs. In May 2017, the [Committee Against Torture](#) found that there is a “widespread acceptance by judges of coerced confessions” in criminal cases. The government effectively cancelled a visit by the UN Special Rapporteur on torture, and has refused to allow any UN Special Procedures mandate to enter the country and investigate these abuses since 2006.

## **Conclusion**

We believe businesses have a particularly important role to play in protecting human rights and we are not alone: the 2016 UN Human Rights Council Resolution [A/HRC/RES/31/32](#), the latest [report](#) by the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders, the [statement](#) by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights to the World Economic Forum 2017, and the [2017 World Economic Forum’s Global Risks Report](#) all call upon businesses to do so.

Principle 13 of the [UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights](#) states that business enterprises have a responsibility to “avoid causing or contributing to adverse human rights impacts through their own activities.” BAE Systems is obligated to uphold these principles in its association with the Bahrain International Defence Exhibition and Conference. Therefore, in view of Bahrain’s crackdown on human rights since 2016, high frequency of police brutality, and participation in the Yemen War, we urgently request that BAE Systems not take part in this event, and that it refrain from advertising or selling its products to the Bahrain Defence Force until the Kingdom of Bahrain ends its involvement in the Saudi-led intervention in Yemen, and adopts stronger, legally enforceable guarantees that any military equipment it purchases will not be used to undermine Bahraini citizens’ freedom of expression.

We call on you to exercise human rights due diligence, as per your corporate commitment. Failing to exercise due diligence and thus abide by the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights risks greater complicity in human rights abuses in Bahrain and the tarnishing of your brand’s reputation.

Yours sincerely,

Americans for Democracy & Human Rights in Bahrain  
Bahrain Institute for Rights and Democracy  
Campaign Against the Arms Trade  
European Centre for Democracy and Human Rights