



**Human Rights Watch Statement
Item 6 – Adoption of the Outcome of the Bahrain UPR
19 September 2012**

Thank you Mr. President,

The Human Rights Council's review of Bahrain comes at a time when the government continues to suppress peaceful protests, harass and prosecute human rights defenders, and arbitrarily arrest and detain numerous opposition leaders and protesters for demanding respect for their fundamental human rights.

We welcome the UPR report on Bahrain and urge the government to implement fully the accepted recommendations, including holding security forces accountable for rights abuses such as torture, ill-treatment and deaths of detainees in government custody; releasing immediately and unconditionally individuals convicted solely for peaceful participation in demonstrations and their criticism of officials; ending the intimidation and harassment of human rights defenders; ending unnecessary restrictions on foreign journalists and international rights organizations seeking to visit Bahrain; and setting a timeframe to implement the recommendations of the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry (BICI).

While the government publicly claims it respects the universally protected rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly, authorities continue to suppress peaceful dissent. For example, on August 16, 2012, a Bahraini court sentenced Nabeel Rajab, president of the Bahrain Center for Human Rights, to three years in prison for calling and participating in peaceful demonstrations without permits between January and March 2012.

We are also concerned about a recent ruling of the court of appeal to uphold a military court's convictions of 21 protest leaders—seven of them *in absentia*—for offenses related to the exercise of freedom of expression, assembly and association. The BICI, appointed by King Hamid bin Isa Al Khalifa, found that the defendants had been subjected to ill-treatments for the purpose of securing confessions that were the basis for their convictions.

Although the authorities have investigated several cases of alleged torture and unlawful killings documented by the BICI, prosecutions have been few and involve mainly low-ranking officers. Despite the fact that the BICI concluded that the abuses "could not have happened without the knowledge of higher echelons of the command structure" of the security forces, the investigations and prosecutions have so far not included any high-ranking officials.

Bahrain did not respond to concerns that its Penal Code and law regulating associations fall short of respecting international standards and allow for the prosecution of individuals in violation of their rights to free expression, association and peaceful assembly. The government of Bahrain should stop denying that human rights are being violated and take concrete steps to address the concerns reflected in the UPR debate. In line with the BICI conclusions and the UPR recommendations accepted by Bahrain, Human Rights Watch calls upon the government to quash the verdicts and immediately release all individuals convicted solely for exercising their basic rights. Among those who should be immediately released are Nabeel Rajab, and the 21 protest leaders. The investigations into allegations of torture and ill-treatment should include high-ranking officers at the Ministry of Interior the National Security Agency and the Bahrain Defense Force. Finally, the government should allow its citizens to exercise their rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly without fear of suppression or prosecution.

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