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# **Submission to Bahrain's UPR Third Cycle**

Human Rights Council UPR Working Group 27th Session  
**April-May 2017**

In this report, Human Rights First includes a follow up to the previous universal periodical review and makes recommendations for the following areas:

- **Wrongful Imprisonment**

Several human rights defenders were in custody or in prison in late 2016 for reasons connected with their peaceful activities. These include anti-corruption and women's rights activist Ghada Jamsheer, and Nabeel Rajab. He was taken into detention, charged with what the government described as “insulting a statutory body” and “spreading rumors during wartime”. He was also charged with “undermining the prestige” of Bahrain for publishing an article in The New York Times. If convicted, Rajab could [face](#) up to 15 years in prison under Bahrain's penal code.

Other HRDs remained in prison sentenced to long terms, including Abdulhadi Alkhawaja, the former president and co-founder of the [Bahrain Centre for Human Rights](#) and the former Coordinator of Middle East and North Africa Protection at [Front Line Defenders](#). He is serving a life sentence for his part in the 2011 protests. Naji Fateel from the NGO Bahrain Youth Society is serving a 15-year imprisonment sentence).

[Dr. Ali Al-Ekri](#), a paediatric orthopaedic surgeon was also arrested in 2011 after treating injured protestors and denouncing the violence used by armed forces, and is nearing the end of a five-year sentence.

No adequate investigations have taken place into the torture sustained by Al-Khawaja, Fateel, al Elkri and others. Human Rights First urges the Universal Periodic Review to make the following recommendations in its outcome document:

- Release all human rights defenders detained immediately and unconditionally.
- Put an end to any act of harassment, including at the judicial level, against human rights defenders.
- The government should invite the Special Rapporteur for Human Rights Defenders and invite the Special Rapporteur on Torture to visit Bahrain.
- The government should accede to Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture (OPCAT)
- Ensure the implementation and address the lack of progress in the following 2012 UPR recommendations (Area 5.1: Constitutional & legislative framework):
  - 115.92. Prohibit torture and other ill-treatment, in national legislation and in practice in line with its obligations under CAT, ensuring that all allegations of torture or other ill-treatment are independently, promptly and thoroughly investigated, and perpetrators are brought to justice in accordance to international fair trial standards (Slovakia);
  - 115.146. Release all political prisoners and bring its national legislation into compliance with article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights which guarantees freedom of expression ( France ); and

- 115.159. Release persons imprisoned as required by freedom of expression and repeal all legislation that criminalizes the exercise of this right ( Switzerland )

- **Reprisals and travel bans**

Human Rights First documented acts of intimidation and reprisals against activists peacefully expressing dissent, including those who have participated at the UN Human Rights Council or other venues. Since May 2016, the Bahraini instituted a widespread restriction on travel by human rights defenders, including many who were prevented from attending the council.

Human rights lawyer Mohamed Al Tajer was prevented from leaving Bahrain. Sheikh Maytham Al-Salman, an internationally-recognized interfaith leader, and an expert at Columbia University's [Global Freedom of Expression](#) initiative has also been targeted several times by the authorities and was charged in August 2015 with "inciting hatred against the regime" and "publication of false news" after returning to Bahrain from a UN conference on hate-speech. In August 2016, he was summoned for questioning to the Ministry of Interior and was charged with taking part in an illegal gathering. His passport has also been withheld, which prevented him from attending a fellowship program at Stanford University.

Travel bans have also been imposed against a range of activists including Abdulnabi Al-Ekry, Ahmed Radi, Jalila Al Salman, Taha Alderazi, Nedal Al-Salman, Enas Oun and Hussain Radhi.

Human Rights First urges the Universal Periodic Review to make the following recommendations in its outcome document:

- Call on the government to lift all restrictions on movements of human rights defenders
- Address the lack of progress and ensure the implementation of the following 2012 UPR recommendations (Area 36: Human rights defenders):
  - 115.147. That human rights defenders must be protected and allowed to conduct their work without hindrance, intimidation or harassment ( Norway )
  - 115.150. Abandon any restriction or obstacle to the work of persons and institutions engaged in the protection and promotion of human rights ( Switzerland )
  - 115.158. Cease all intimidation or repression against human rights defenders, journalists and Non-Governmental Organizations ( Spain )

- **HRDs Forced Into Exile**

A large number of human rights defenders have been forced into exile. Zainab Al-Khawaja was [imprisoned with her toddler son](#) in March 2016 and [forced to leave](#) the country when released in May 2016.

Yousif Almuhafda, the vice-president of the Bahrain Center for Human Rights also reported [receiving threats](#) from the former officer of the national security apparatus and decided - for his safety and to continue his work - to go into exile in October 2013.

Maryam Al-Khawaja, Co-Director of the Gulf Center for Human Rights has also been living in

self-imposed [exile](#) Since 2011. When she tried to visit Bahrain to see her imprisoned father in August 2014 she was arrested on upon arrival at Bahrain's International Airport. She was released after several weeks in jail and left the country. In December 2014 she was [sentenced](#) in absentia to one year in prison.

Human Rights First call the government of Bahrain to take immediate and concrete action to protect human rights defenders from intimidation, prosecution and forced displacement.

Other prominent members of civil society forced into exile include Husain Jawad, Asma Darwish and Sayed Alwadaei.

Human Rights First urges the Universal Periodic Review to make the following recommendations in its outcome document:

- Allow human rights defenders, journalists, and other dissidents forced into exile to return to Bahrain and enjoy their fundamental freedoms without the threat of imprisonment or other reprisals.
- Press charges for threatening human rights defenders and dissidents from individuals and groups loyal to the regime.

## APPENDIX

### For additional information:

- Human Rights First, Testimony to the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission: "Human Rights in Bahrain: Next Steps" (September, 2016), available at: [http://www.humanrightsfirst.org/sites/default/files/Brian\\_Dooley\\_Bahrain\\_testimony\\_Lantos\\_Sept2016.pdf](http://www.humanrightsfirst.org/sites/default/files/Brian_Dooley_Bahrain_testimony_Lantos_Sept2016.pdf)
- Human Rights First, "Human Rights Defenders and Political Prisoners in Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Bahrain" (April, 2016), available at: <http://www.humanrightsfirst.org/resource/human-rights-defenders-and-political-prisoners-saudi-arabia-united-arab-emirates-and>
- Human Rights First, "Bahrain Timeline 2010-2016" (February, 2016), available at: <http://www.humanrightsfirst.org/sites/default/files/HRF-Bahrain-timeline-hires-spread.pdf>
- Human Rights First, "How to Reverse Five Years of Failure on Bahrain" (February 2016), available at: <http://www.humanrightsfirst.org/sites/default/files/HRFHow%20to%20ReverseFiveYearsofFailure%20onBahrain.pdf>
- Human Rights First, "Remarks by Brian Dooley: Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission Briefing on Bahrain" (February, 2016), available at: <http://www.humanrightsfirst.org/sites/default/files/HRF-Dooley-remarks-on-Bahrain-2016.pdf>

- Human Rights First, "Recommendations to the U.S. Government on Bahrain" (November, 2015), available at: <http://www.humanrightsfirst.org/sites/default/files/BICI-factsheet.pdf>
- Human Rights First, "How to Bring Stability to Bahrain" (February 2015), available at: <http://www.humanrightsfirst.org/sites/default/files/How-to-Bring-Stability-to-Bahrain.pdf>
- Human Rights First, "Plan B for Bahrain" (November, 2013), available at: <http://www.humanrightsfirst.org/uploads/pdfs/HRF-Plan-B-Bahrain-rep.pdf>
- Human Rights First, Testimony to the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission: "Implementation of the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry Report" Hearing (August, 2012), available at: <http://www.humanrightsfirst.org/wp-content/uploads/Brian-Dooley-Lantos-Testimony-on-Bahrain.pdf>