

November 21, 2011

The Honorable Hillary Rodham Clinton
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Secretary Clinton:

We are writing to you out of concern with ongoing developments in Bahrain. We agree with your recent statement that, “meaningful reform and equal treatment for all Bahrainis are in Bahrain’s interest, in the region’s interest, and in ours.”

As we await the report of the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry (BICI) on November 23, we are also pleased to hear that the administration will “review the Commission’s findings carefully and assess the Government of Bahrain’s efforts to implement the recommendations and make needed reforms.”

We are hopeful the BICI report will thoroughly document human rights violations committed in Bahrain that have been independently verified by international human rights organizations such as Human Rights Watch, Human Rights First, Amnesty International, Physicians for Human Rights, and many others since protests began in February. Furthermore, we hope the implementation of reform and accountability mechanisms for human rights violations will lead to a process of substantive political reform that is responsive to the legitimate democratic aspirations of the Bahraini people.

As you noted recently, “mass arrests and brute force are at odds with the universal rights of Bahrain’s citizens and will not make legitimate calls for reform go away.” In order to restore public confidence and deliver on its promises to uphold human rights and accountability, the U.S. Government should urge the Government of Bahrain to:

- Unconditionally release political prisoners and end torture, arbitrary detention, and incommunicado detention;
- Protect Shi’a places of worship and religious buildings, rebuild destroyed mosques, and end systematic discrimination in political representation, government recruitment, employment, and naturalization policies;
- Take measures to ensure the reinstatement of all workers and employees who were dismissed from their workplace for peacefully exercising their right to freedom of expression, political opinion, and assembly;
- Allow and fully cooperate with independent human rights organizations and observers, including U.N. bodies such as the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, to investigate claims of human rights abuses;
- Investigate and hold accountable all individuals who authorized, condoned, or committed human rights abuses, including the use of violence or torture against peaceful protesters and detainees
- Release medical professionals and political prisoners who have been detained without charge or convicted and sentenced for political offenses; and
- Allow access by local and international journalists to activists, protest sites, hospitals and other public institutions.

While we hope the BICI report will comprehensively address the range of past and ongoing human rights abuses, the Government of Bahrain’s commitment to reform should be demonstrated by concrete efforts to quickly implement serious reforms. The democratic demands of the Bahraini people are based on a universal desire for dignity and self-determination. Such demands include, but are not limited to:

- The empowerment of elected rather than appointed government institutions.
- Universal and equal suffrage, including in the designation of electoral districts;
- A judicial system that operates independently, both financially and administratively, and is impartial and transparent in its proceedings;
- The elimination of discrimination in respect of employment and occupation based on political opinions that are different than others; and
- A security apparatus respectful of human rights and subject to independent review.

These concerns have been articulated in documents such as the National Action Charter of 2001, the Manama Document of October 2011, and points laid out by the Crown Prince of Bahrain in a speech on March 13, 2011.

After considering the recommendations of the BICI report and previous reports by international rights organizations, we hope that, as you have stated, the U.S. Government will “hold the Bahraini Government to these commitments and to encourage the opposition to respond constructively to secure lasting reform.”

We were pleased to see the delay of the recently proposed sale of arms to Bahrain, and we hope that no sale of items that could be used to repress the Bahraini people will move forward until reforms are agreed to, implementation has begun, and the Bahraini government has clearly ceased using torture and violence against its own people. As we also recognize the “need for dialogue, reconciliation, and concrete reforms,” we look forward to a comprehensive reconciliation process that restores respect for human rights and holds violators accountable. We hope that process will be a first step that can lead to a meaningful, substantive national dialogue, which includes all parts of the peaceful opposition, to produce concrete political reforms that meet the democratic aspirations of the Bahraini people.

Sincerely,

Stephen McInerney

Project on Middle East Democracy

Elisa Massimino

Human Rights First

Hans Hogrefe

Physicians for Human Rights

Michele Dunne

Atlantic Council

Elliott Abrams

Council on Foreign Relations

Steven Heydemann

Georgetown University

Matthew Duss

Center for American Progress

Jean-Francois Julliard

Reporters Without Borders

Robert Naiman

Just Foreign Policy

Diane Randall

Friends Committee on National Legislation

Toby Jones

Rutgers University

Laurie A. Brand

University of Southern California

Lisa Schirch

3P Human Security

James E. Winkler

General Board of Church and Society, The United Methodist Church

Tom Malinowski

Human Rights Watch

David J. Kramer

Freedom House

Shawna Bader-Blau

Solidarity Center

Jennifer L. Windsor

Georgetown University

Andrew Exum

Center for a New American Security

Cathy Feingold

AFL-CIO

Juan Cole

University of Michigan

Jamie M. Fly

Foreign Policy Initiative

Suad Joseph

University of California, Davis

Jon Rainwater

Peace Action West

Charles Butterworth

University of Maryland

Husain Abdulla

Americans for Democracy and Human Rights in Bahrain

Ehtisham Abidi

Universal Muslim Association of America

Zachary Lockman

New York University