



Americans for Democracy and Human Rights in Bahrain

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US Members of Congress Condemn Retaliation by Bahrain Government against Teachers' Association Leader Jalila al-Salman

In a letter sent to Bahrain's US Ambassador last week, nearly a dozen Members of Congress condemned a decision by Bahrain's Ministry of Education to prematurely terminate Jalila al-Salman, vice president of the Bahrain Teachers' Association, from her teaching position in February. In a stinging rebuke of the Bahrain government's actions, the lawmakers said that there is "little doubt" that the decision is "the latest in a long line of efforts by the Government of Bahrain to punish Ms. al-Salman for exercising her rights to freedom of speech, expression, assembly, and association."

In the letter, which was signed by both Republicans and Democrats, legislators express concern that Ms. al-Salman's termination may have come as a result of her "advocacy efforts in Washington, D.C." Several lawmakers who signed on to the letter met with Ms. al-Salman during her visit. During her trip to Washington, Ms. al-Salman also participated in a public panel event in which she spoke about human rights violations committed in Bahrain. The event was broadcast live over the internet, although viewers in Bahrain claimed that access to the website was blocked as soon as the panel discussion turned to Bahrain.

Ms. al-Salman has been a frequent target of harassment by the Bahrain government since the outbreak of protests in 2011, when she helped to organize peaceful demonstrations by educators in support of the protest movement. As a result of her organizing efforts, Ms. al-Salman was arrested and charged with "inciting hatred of the regime" and "attempting to overthrow the regime," although no evidence of such charges was ever produced in court. She was ultimately sentenced to six months in prison—reduced from three years—for these charges, but was later released on bail. During her detention, Ms. al-Salman was subjected to abuse, including sleep and sensory deprivation, solitary confinement, forced standing, and sexual assault, and was forced to sign a false confession.

According to the Government of Bahrain, Ms. al-Salman was allegedly terminated as a result of the "final verdict" in her criminal case. However, because Ms. al-Salman has filed an appeal of the verdict in her criminal case to the Court of Cassation—Bahrain's highest court—a final verdict has not yet been rendered, which suggests that Ms. al-Salman's termination may have been done prematurely.

In their letter to Bahrain's Ambassador, Members of Congress called for the Education Ministry's termination decision to be reversed so that Ms. al-Salman may "freely practice her occupation without interference or retribution," and also called for Ms. al-Salman to be compensated for any unpaid wages since her initial arrest in 2011.