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As a voice for human rights defenders and peaceful political reformers in Bahrain and throughout the Arab Gulf, we at Americans for Human Rights & Democracy in Bahrain seek to publicize the messages and efforts of activists whom U.S. lawmakers and media outlets may not otherwise meet. While my staff and I work with dozens of human rights advocates, over the past year we have repeatedly brought attention to Waleed Abu al-Khair's considerable body of work. I can affirmatively state that Mr. Abu al-Khair embodies the best of both the legal profession and the principled defense of basic human rights and freedoms.

We have diligently worked on his behalf because, among activists and reformers in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states, Waleed is well-known and highly respected. When other defense attorneys in Saudi Arabia feared to challenge the government's indefinite detention of peaceful political dissidents, Waleed risked his career for the sake of providing them fair representation. In 2009, he assumed the case of the Jeddah Reformers, a group of activists arrested by the government in 2007 for attempting to found a human rights organization. In this capacity, he filed a complaint against the Ministry of Interior on behalf of Dr. Abdulrahman al-Shumairi, who had been detained without trial for two years. He went on to represent liberal activist Raif Badawi, whom the criminal court sentenced to seven years in prison and 600 lashes (a punishment since increased) in a representative demonstration of the arbitrary sentencing which the Saudi system of justice frequently employs.

When he was not acting directly as an attorney, Waleed was organizing campaigns with other political reformers, calling for needed governing changes and advocating for the release of prisoners of conscience. He founded a non-governmental organization, the Monitor of Human Rights in Saudi Arabia. He spoke eloquently to international media outlets, including the BBC, on the lack of freedoms in his country. He was a consummate human rights advocate, complementing his direct action with efforts to inform other Saudis and the international community about the basic rights which they are due.

Needed political and social reforms do not occur spontaneously, nor are they the products of wishful thinking. The establishment of an impartial system of justice in Saudi Arabia requires, as it has elsewhere, the personal endeavors of men and women like Waleed. In recognition of the importance of this struggle, the international community should continue using all avenues available to press for his immediate release and for the Saudi government's adoption of real and lasting legal and political reform.

Sincerely,

Husain Abdulla, Executive Director  
Americans for Democracy & Human Rights in Bahrain