



HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

Rt Hon Jeremy Hunt MP
Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs
King Charles St,
London, SW1A 2AH

18 June 2019

Dear Foreign Secretary,

We write to raise concerns for the deterioration of conditions in Bahrain's Isa Town Prison. In particular, we are alarmed by the imposition of certain policies on family visitation and the deliberate denial of medical treatment to political prisoners. The prison administration has refused to lift these restrictions even during Eid celebrations, despite the womens' numerous requests. With no apparent legal or security rationale to justify recent policies, the clear inference is that they have been adopted punitively. According to the UN Standard Minimum Rules on the Treatment of Prisoners (Mandela Rules), restrictions that are purely punitive in nature are impermissible.

Denial of Medical Treatment

First, prison authorities are failing to provide adequate medical treatment for inmate Hajer Mansoor. Ms Mansoor undertook a mammogram in August 2018 for a lump she found in her breast. She was forced to wait until 24 February 2019 - over six months - for an appointment with a specialist to learn the outcome of this exam. Although the doctor informed her that the lump was not cancerous, he advised her to undergo further examinations, including an ultrasound, which have not been arranged to date. Furthermore, prison authorities have failed to provide Ms Mansoor with any medical report outlining the results of her mammogram.

Ms Mansoor has also been diagnosed with kidney stones which are causing her difficulty sleeping due to the pain. Authorities have failed consistently to schedule the requisite follow-up appointments and treatment for this ailment.

Family Visitation and Time Outside the Cell

Secondly, punitive restrictions imposed in September 2018 following the physical assault¹ of Ms Mansoor and of her cellmates Ms Medina Ali and Ms Najah Yusuf under the leadership of Lt. Col.

¹ Catherine Philip, "Bahrain 'tortured woman' to avenge human rights leaks", *The Times*, 28 September 2018, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/bahrain-tortured-woman-to-avenge-human-rights-leaks-cb5rqlh6x>.

Mariam Albardoli, remain in place today. Since the assault, a glass barrier has been imposed during family visitation impeding any physical contact between the women and their families. Ms Mansoor, Ms Yusuf and Ms Ali rightly refuse to see their families under such conditions due to the great distress it would cause to their children and elderly parents.

Despite the women's request to remove the barrier to celebrate the Eid holiday, the prison authorities refused to do so. Consequently, they have not seen their families for the past nine months. Additionally, while the prison previously followed an open-cell policy, inmates have reported that they are now confined to their cells for between 22 and 23 hours a day.

International Response

The UN has expressed concerns about the poor prison conditions endured by Ms Mansoor, Ms Ali and Ms Yusuf², asserting that their present situation has become intolerable. These women should not be in prison in the first place; the Bahrain Institute for Rights and Democracy (BIRD) has repeatedly outlined the politicised nature of their cases. The UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention has declared Ms Mansoor's arrest to be arbitrary and a reprisal for her son-in-law's human rights activism.³ Human Rights Watch along with 14 other NGOs have condemned Najah's alleged torture and sexual abuse in detention and called for her release,⁴ while the US Department of State reported Medina's allegations of strip searches and punitive measures for her "political views".⁵

Our Requests

When bodies trained through the UK's technical assistance programme to Bahrain consistently fail to act on behalf of victims of human rights abuses, the UK government has a responsibility to do so. To date, the UK government's response has been disappointing and does not reflect Britain's commitment to human rights. We urge your office to take a stronger stance on behalf of Ms Mansoor, Ms Yusuf and Ms Ali to immediately remedy the situation and disclose the steps you will take to:

- a) Urgently address the denial of medical care and punitive measures highlighted in this letter;

² United Nations General Assembly Human Rights Council, 40th Session, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders*, A/HRC/40/60, 10 January 2019, <https://undocs.org/A/HRC/40/60>.

³ Catherine Philip, "UN rebukes Bahrain over jailing of activist's family", *The Times*, 11 January 2019, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/un-rebukes-bahrain-over-jailing-of-activist-s-family-hr89np7ih>

⁴ Human Rights Watch *et al.*, Joint Letter to the Fédération Internationale de l'Automobile, 27 March 2019, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/03/27/joint-letter-federation-internationale-de-lautomobile>

⁵ Us Department of State, Bahrain 2018 Human Rights Report, 13 March 2019, <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/BAHRAIN-2018.pdf>



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- b) Hold those responsible for abuse in Isa Town prison to account, namely Lt. Col. Mariam Albardoli;
- c) Secure the immediate and unconditional release of Ms Mansoor, Ms Ali and Ms Yusuf and all female political prisoners.

Please note that we have made this letter open to the public.

Yours Sincerely,

Tom Brake MP, *Liberal Democrat*

Sir Peter Bottomley, *Conservative*

Caroline Lucas MP, *Green*

Layla Moran MP, *Liberal Democrat*

Chris Law MP, *Scottish National Party*

Alistair Carmichael MP, *Liberal Democrat*

Diana Johnson MP, *Labour*

Julie Cooper MP, *Labour*

John Cryer MP, *Labour*

Lloyd Russell-Moyle MP,

Labour

Andy Slaughter MP, *Labour*

Ian Lucas MP, *Labour*

Matt Western MP, *Labour*

Jonathan Edwards, *Plaid Cymru*

Lord Scriven, *Liberal Democrat*

Lord Judd, *Labour*