



Mr. President,

Americans for Democracy & Human Rights in Bahrain and the Bahrain Institute for Rights and Democracy would like to join the High Commissioner for Human Rights in voicing concern regarding restrictions on free expression. We too believe that the stifling of free speech and expression in many States represents an assault on fundamental human rights.

For example, in the State of Qatar, the poet Mohammed al-Ajami is currently serving a 15-year sentence in a Qatari prison. In August 2010, al-Ajami recited a poem at a private event in Cairo. The Government of Qatar arrested him in November 2011 based on the contents of his poetry, charging him with insulting the emir and inciting to overthrow the ruling system. His offending poetry spoke to Gulf citizens' aspirations to make every person's voice heard. The State of Qatar convicted al-Ajami in November 2012 and sentenced him to life imprisonment. Qatar's Supreme Court upheld a reduced 15-year prison sentence for al-Ajami in October 2013, exhausting Al-Ajami's legal avenues for redress. He remains imprisoned in Qatar.

Other activists in Gulf countries like the UAE, Bahrain, and Saudi Arabia have been imprisoned for expressing their views on Twitter. Just this year, Bahraini human rights defender Nabeel Rajab was imprisoned and Emirati activist Nasser bin Ghaith has reportedly been disappeared in relation to their tweets.

With these examples of restrictions on free expression across the GCC, we call on States to condemn such practices, with a view towards supporting international standards of free expression. We further call on States to abandon any restrictions on free and peaceful expression. We welcome the High Commissioner's call for States to support the fundamental human right to free expression.

Thank you.