



His Majesty, King of Bahrain  
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16 November 2018

Your Majesty,

We write regarding the upcoming elections for Bahrain's lower house of parliament, the Council of Representatives, taking place on 24 November. We are deeply concerned about the restrictive political environment in Bahrain, in particular the government's effective closing of all civil and political space. On 4 November, the Secretary General of Bahrain's largest dissolved political society, Sheikh Ali Salman, was [sentenced](#) to life imprisonment. This sentence raises further concerns that the results will be viewed as unfree, unfair, and illegitimate. To ensure international recognition of election results, we urge you to take all necessary steps to ensure the elections' credibility, including by releasing political prisoners and allowing the formation of independent civil and political society organisations.

### **Denial of Political Participation**

In order for the elections to meet international standards of free and fair elections, citizens must be able to organise politically and have the opportunity to support a wide range of candidates running for office. However, your government's decision to forcibly dissolve all major political opposition groups, including Al-Wefaq and Wa'ad, deprives large sectors of the population of their preferred political associations. Actions taken by your government's security services – including harassment, intimidation, and arrest – towards smaller political societies like Al-Wahdawi, and high-profile leaders, further marginalised political opposition groups and limit many citizens' ability to vote for policies they support.

We are particularly concerned over the continued detentions of political leaders Hassan Mushaima and Sheikh Ali Salman. Hassan Mushaima was formerly the Secretary General of the Haq Movement for Liberty and Democracy, and the co-founder and former Vice President of Al-Wefaq. He is currently serving a life sentence in Jau Prison due to his political activism, and he has been subjected to ill treatment, including the denial of healthcare and restricted access to medication by the Jau Prison administration. Before the verdict on 4 November, Sheikh Ali Salman, was approaching the end of a four

year sentence based solely on peaceful freedom of expression charges stemming from speeches he had delivered in 2014.

Your government's decision in May 2018 to amend the Law on the Exercise of Political Rights has had a severely detrimental effect on ensuring the elections are free and fair. The amendment bans anyone who has ever belonged to one of the dissolved opposition societies for running for office, as well as anyone sentenced to more than six months in prison. Between the membership of the dissolved opposition groups and the countless Bahrainis incarcerated on charges that criminalise free expression and assembly, the ban prohibits potentially tens of thousands of people from holding elected office. This move has further exacerbated our concerns about political representation, as individuals who have historic affiliations with dissolved political societies are being denied political participation in these elections.

### **Suppression of Dissent**

Free and fair elections can only occur when citizens are free to express and debate their views on matters of public concern. Yet, the only independent newspaper, [Al-Wasat](#), was forcibly closed in 2017, while at least 15 journalists are currently [imprisoned](#). In addition, foreign media looking into human rights concerns are barred from entering the country. Meanwhile, human rights defenders and activists are routinely targeted by authorities, specifically on the basis of their work. [Nabeel Rajab](#), has joined his partners [Abdulahadi al-Khawaja](#) and Abduljalil al-Singace in prison, for comments deemed critical of the Bahraini state, while activist Ali Hajji and rights defender Naji Fateel are also languishing in prison. Family members of London-based human rights defender [Sayed Ahmed Alwadaei](#), are serving prison sentences which were described by the [UN Secretary-General](#) as in reprisal to his human rights work. Reports of torture and sexual assault against female activists, Hajer Mansoor, Medina Ali and Najah Yusuf are equally concerning.

### **Non-Partisan Electoral Infrastructure**

Bahrain's electoral infrastructure is inherently disadvantageous to the political opposition. Voting districts have been drawn to disenfranchise the Shia community and to significantly favour the minority Sunni population. Polling stations are not tied to specific constituencies and are thus vulnerable to manipulation and interference. Furthermore, there is no independent and impartial electoral commission to investigate concerns or allegations of voter fraud or intimidation at the polls, nor has your government committed to permitting independent domestic or international election monitoring.

### **Our Requests**

The upcoming elections should be an opportunity for Bahrain to ease tensions and allow space for open dialogue to take place. Instead, we have seen the enactment of increasingly repressive measures. Under these conditions, Bahrain's elections cannot be recognised by the international community as free, fair, or legitimate. We thus strongly encourage you to:

1. Release political prisoners, including: Sheikh Ali Salman, Hassan Mushaima, Abduljalil al-Singace, Abdulhadi al-Khawaja, Nabeel Rajab, Ali Hajji, Naji Fateel, Hajer Mansoor, Medina

- Ali, Najah Yusuf, and the family members of Sayed Alwadaei;
2. Facilitate independent and impartial election monitoring by international observers and the United Nations throughout the election process;
  3. Allow for the formation and unhindered operation of political opposition societies, including Al-Wafaq and Wa'ad;
  4. Redraw electoral districts to eliminate gerrymandering;
  5. Repeal the May 2018 amendment to the Law on the Exercise of Political Rights.

Sincerely,

*Members of the European Parliament*

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Petras Austrevicius, Chair D-AF (ALDE)

Brando Benifei (S&D)

Lynn Boylan (GUE/NGL)

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