

29 NGOs submit letter to newly appointed Foreign Secretary, Philip Hammond, urging a change of policy on Bahrain

16 July 2014, London – A group of 29 NGOs have sent a letter to the newly appointed Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, Phillip Hammond, urging a shift in U.K. policy towards the situation in Bahrain. The letter calls for a ‘fresh’ approach to be adopted by the new Foreign Secretary in light of the FCO’s failure to heed a Foreign Affairs Committee recommendation that the U.K. should “designate Bahrain as a country of concern” in its 2014 human rights report if the situation had not improved by the start of this year. Despite this recommendation, the FCO subsequently failed to acknowledge Bahrain as a country of concern, and instead, listed it as a “case study” praising specific areas of reform. The letter highlights the inconsistencies in U.K. policy towards Bahrain in recent years, specifically referencing recent statements made by the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture, Juan Mendez, who claimed that the human rights situation in Bahrain is a situation of “grave concern” and that recommendations made by the 2011 report of the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry are in a “state of non-implementation”. The U.K. recently cosponsored a joint-statement on Bahrain at the U.N. Human Rights Council citing concern over “the continued harassment and imprisonment of persons exercising their rights to freedom of opinion and expression, including human rights defenders and journalists,” a serious issue that has not been reflected by FCO policy.

The Head of Advocacy for the Bahrain Institute for Rights and Democracy, Mr Sayed Alwadaei, stated that the U.K.’s “credibility on human rights has been challenged because of its stance on the serious ongoing human rights violations in Bahrain”. Mr Alwadaei asserts, “putting Bahrain on the list of countries of concern is the first step in ensuring that U.K. foreign policy towards Bahrain accurately reflects the reality of the situation on the ground”.

Despite recently reported encounters between Mr. Hammond and Bahraini government lobbyists, the joint effort is hopeful that Mr. Hammond can consider a fresh Foreign Office response to the ongoing human rights and political crisis in Bahrain.

Signatories:

Aman Network
Americans for Democracy and Human Rights in Bahrain (ADHRB)
Arabic Network for Human Rights Information (ANHRI)
Article 19 (Bahrain)
Avocats Sans Frontières (ASF) Network
Bahrain Centre for Human Rights (BCHR)
Bahrain Human Rights Observatory (BHRO)
Bahrain Institute for Rights and Democracy (BIRD)
Bahrain Justice and Development Movement (BJDM)
Bahrain Youth Society for Human Rights (BYSHR)
Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (CIHRS)
Canadian Journalists for Free Expression (CJFE)
CIVICUS
CM Solutions
English PEN
European Bahraini Organisation for Human Rights (EBOHR)
Gulf Center for Human Rights (GCHR)
International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH)
Khiam Rehabilitation Center (KRC)
Lawyers Rights Watch Canada
Lawyers Without Borders, Sweden
Maharat Foundation
PEN International
Privacy International
Redress
Reporters Sans Frontières (RSF)

Reprieve
Tunisian Initiative for Freedom of Expression
Vivarta