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the voice of free expression



Simon Brooks-Ward, CVO,
Jonathan Goold, Director,
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Dear Simon Brooks-Ward, Jonathan Goold and Penny Henderson,

We write ahead of this week's Royal Windsor Horse Show urging that Queen Elizabeth II not meet with King Hamad of Bahrain and his son, Prince Nasser, and to sever the ties between the horse show and the Kingdom of Bahrain until the adoption of strong ethical commitments preventing states, companies and individuals linked to human rights abuses from involvement with the horse show.

King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa of Bahrain, who sponsors four events in the show, is directly involved in the serious deterioration in the human rights situation in Bahrain that has taken place over the past year. Prince Nasser is also a member of the ruling family and is implicated in the human rights situation there. The Kingdom of Bahrain uses the prestige of the Royal Windsor Horse Show to whitewash its human rights abuses, and the close relations they enjoy with the horse show and the royal family are a source of considerable reputational risk to both the Royal Windsor Horse Show and Buckingham Palace. We note that both the Royal Windsor Horse Show and Buckingham Palace have been the subject of criticism over the close relationship with Bahrain's monarchy.

Unlawful Executions and Death Row Cases

There are currently ten Bahrainis sentenced to death for politically related charges, the most recent sentences passed in March 2017. In all, thirteen people are on death row, six of them sentenced in March alone. On January 15, following King Hamad's signing of their death warrants, the Government of Bahrain executed three men: Sami Mushaima, Ali Al-Singace, and Abbas Al-Sameea. These were the first executions of Bahraini nationals since 1996 (albeit their citizenship had been stripped beforehand). They were charged with the murder of three police officers. However, there were serious allegations that the men had been tortured and subjected to an unfair trial. The Foreign Secretary reiterated his objection to the use of the death penalty in a statement, in which he stated that he had "raised the issue with the Bahraini government." The UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights said it was "appalled", citing their alleged torture in custody and the fact that "their lawyers were not given access to all the hearings against them nor allowed to cross-examine prosecution witnesses during court hearings." The UN Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions declared the executions "extrajudicial killings." These executions have raised concerns that King Hamad Al Khalifa will approve the executions of two Bahrainis,

Mohamed Ramadan and Husain Ali Moosa, whose convictions were based almost exclusively on confessions that Mr Ramadan and Mr Moosa allege were coerced through torture; both men later retracted their confessions. Moreover, we are deeply concerned by the fact that purportedly independent torture investigators in Bahrain, namely the Special Investigation Unit and the Interior Ministry Ombudsman, failed to investigate torture allegations in several of these cases, allowing the trials of all five men to proceed in relying on confessions allegedly extracted through torture.

Marked Deterioration in Human Rights Situation since June 2016

These cases are symptomatic of the concerning deterioration in the human rights situation in Bahrain over the last 12 months during which time an orchestrated crackdown on the rights to free expression, assembly and association have badly undermined prospects for a political solution to Bahrain's domestic unrest. In June 2016, Bahraini authorities dissolved the main political opposition group, al-Wifaq; jailed the country's leading human rights defender, Nabeel Rajab; charged a prominent human rights lawyer, Mohamed al-Tajer (the lawyer of the two men sentenced to death noted above), with offences that violate his right to free expression; further undermined media freedom by charging a prominent Bahraini journalist with working without a license; and harassed and prosecuted Shia clerics who peacefully protested the arbitrary revocation of the citizenship of Bahrain's most senior Shia cleric leader, Sheikh Isa Qassim. Currently, another opposition group, Wa'ad, faces dissolution; police have held Nabeel Rajab for over 300 days mostly in solitary confinement, with his health in serious deterioration; last month at least 32 activists were summoned for questioning by the Public and charges brought against the majority of them and prevented from travel. Other conduct of the Bahraini authorities: the violent suppression of peaceful protest; the use of torture; and the systematic jailing of activists and their families and the stripping of their citizenship had continued and in many cases accelerated.

Torture, Accountability and Unfair Trials

Credible reports of torture and mistreatment of detainees continue to emerge from Bahrain and the authorities have made little progress in holding police and security forces accountable. In January 2017, King Hamad issued Royal Decree 1/2017, restoring arrest and investigatory powers to Bahrain's National Security Agency (NSA), which conducted "terrorizing" house raids and systematically tortured detainees in 2011, per the report of the Bahrain International Commission of Inquiry (BICI). At least one detainee died in their custody in April 2011 under condition of torture. The decision to grant the NSA the power to arrest and detain people reverses one of the few recommendations the government implemented in accordance with the BICI report's 2011 recommendations.

In March 2017, King Hamad approved a constitutional amendment which paves the way for military courts to try civilians accused of committing crimes against the police and military apparatus. It is notable that Bahrain's civilian courts have already prosecuted journalists, human rights defenders, photographers and political leaders under similar pretences. Bahrain's courts continue to play a key role in the repressive order and have granted the authorities broad discretion to revoke Bahrainis' citizenship. Authorities have continued to arbitrarily strip citizenship from Bahrainis who have been critical of the government, in some cases leaving them stateless.

Allegations Surrounding Prince Nasser of Bahrain

Prince Nasser is the son of Bahrain's King Hamad and the Commander of the Royal Guard, President of the Bahrain Olympic Committee and President of the Supreme

Council for Youth and Sport, the government oversight body for sports. He has also participated in the Royal Windsor Horse Show's endurance races in past years.

Two Bahrainis alleged in court that Prince Nasser personally subjected them to torture between April and May 2011. Sheikh Mirza Al-Mahroos and Sheikh Mohammad Habib Al-Muqdad, two high profile political activists, made the allegations. These were serious allegations. We are not in a position to verify them and as such we can neither endorse nor refute them. However, they have not been investigated. The allegations were dismissed by both military and civilian courts without investigation, and following unfair trials they were sentenced to life sentences, which they continue to serve.

In April 2011, in the midst of a violent government crackdown against peaceful anti-government protestors, Prince Nasser also formed an investigation committee whose role was to identify and sanction athletes who took part in these demonstrations. Prince Nasser made threats against the protestors, stating on Bahrain state-run TV: *"whoever calls for the fall of the regime, may a wall fall on his head ... whether he is an athlete, socialite or politician, whatever he is, he will be held accountable at this time. Today is the judgement day."* Athletes have made credible allegations that they were subjected to torture in 2011 around this time, although there is no suggestion that Nasser was personally involved in the torture of athletes.

Conclusion

Principle 13 of the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights states that business enterprises have a responsibility to "avoid causing or contributing to adverse human rights impacts through their own activities [and] seek to prevent or mitigate adverse human rights impacts that are directly linked to their operations". The HPower Group is obligated to uphold these principles in its association with the Royal Windsor Horse Show. Therefore, having regard to the seriously deteriorating human rights crisis in Bahrain; King Hamad's direct role in signing the death warrants of torture victims and promulgating laws which directly lead to human rights violations; and the additional evidence referred to above, we urgently request from Buckingham Palace and the organisers of the Royal Windsor Horse Show that King Hamad and Prince Nasser not be met by the Queen during this event, and that ties between the horse show and the Kingdom of Bahrain be severed. The Royal Windsor Horse Show and the monarchy risk reputational damage by maintaining close relations with the Kingdom of Bahrain and its head of state, and the continued association only serves to undermine the work of human rights organisations such as ours who are seeking a peaceful and reformative cessation of human rights abuses in Bahrain.

Sincerely Yours,

Bahrain Institute for Rights and Democracy
Americans for Democracy and Human Rights in Bahrain
European Centre for Democracy and Human Rights
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