



Baroness Catherine Ashton of Upholland  
Vice-President/High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy  
Rue de la Loi 200  
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Honourable High Representative

On 5 May 2012 the Bahraini opposition leader, and deputy secretary general of the human rights organisation FIDH, Nabeel Rajab was arrested at Manama airport after returning from a human rights conference in Beirut. Mr Rajab is one of the most well-known human rights activists in the Arab world. On Sunday he appeared before a Lower Criminal Court to face charges of "inciting illegal rallies and marches online by using social networking websites"; showing the struggle for human rights has also moved online. Mr Rajab's arrest is only the latest escalation of the increasingly repressive policy by the Bahraini government against the opposition movement.

In your statement of 13 February 2012 on the anniversary of the unrest in Bahrain you rightly stressed that it was *"indispensable that all sides contribute constructively to the national reconciliation process, including by implementing the recommendations of the report issues by the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry"*. The BICI report and the endorsement of its findings by the Bahraini King should have been the key moment for the Bahraini authorities to fulfil its pledge for a negotiated solution to the continuing unrest and an answer to the calls by Bahraini protestors for more freedom and reforms.

Regrettably, up to date no dialogue with the opposition has been initiated by the government; the announced reforms have yet failed to materialize. However, the excessive use of teargas, beatings of protesters by police officers, arrests and the detainment of opposition leaders continues. Albeit a retrial of 21 opposition leaders has been announced, none of them have been released; including Abdulhadi al-Khawaja (who also holds Danish nationality) and Zainab al-Khawaja. Mr al-Kwawaja is now on his 90th day of hunger strike and has intermittent contact with his family. Recently Member of European Parliament Ana Gomes was prevented from entering Bahrain when she flew there to find out about the case of Mr. al-Khawaja.

It is high time the EU speaks out against the ongoing repression of the opposition and violation of human rights. In its resolution of 15 March 2012 on human rights violations in Bahrain the Parliament called for *"the immediate and unconditional release of all peaceful demonstrators, political activists, human rights defenders, doctors and paramedics, bloggers and journalists"* and urged you to *"hold the*

*Bahraini Government to its promises to respect human rights, implement the necessary reforms, start independent investigations into human rights violations and ensure that those responsible are held to account."*

We urge you to reiterate this call and hold the Bahraini Government to its promises, and to set a clear deadline to be met in order to prevent serious consequences. We call on you to prepare a set of targeted restrictive measures, including; a formal ban on the export of all military equipment (in particular tear gas), to ensure that no military equipment is sold or exported from within the EU to Bahrain; visa bans and asset freezes for those individuals responsible for the violent repression of peaceful protestors. It is essential for the EU's credibility in the region to show that the EU has a consistent policy towards governments violating their citizens' human rights.

Sincerely,

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Edward McMillan-Scott (ALDE)

Sonia Alfano (ALDE)

Hans van Baalen (ALDE)

Catherine Bearder (ALDE)

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