

House Foreign Affairs Committee  
Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission

Briefing  
on  
BAHRAIN: 2022 ELECTIONS

Tuesday, November 1, 2022 – 10:00 a.m.  
Virtual via Cisco WebEx

Thanks to Commission Co-Chairs McGovern and Smith for convening this important briefing on Bahrain's Elections this year, which unfortunately will not be fair nor free, while peaceful opposition leaders languish in prison.

However, it doesn't have to be that way, and there is still time for the Kingdom to reverse course while it's in the international spotlight. In November, the Kingdom of Bahrain will be subject to international attention not only for its show of elections, but also a review of its human rights record under the UN Universal Periodic Review and a visit by Pope Francis.

This is an opportune time for the Kingdom of Bahrain to demonstrate its commitment to reform, and there is no better way to do that than freeing all of its political prisoners.

To start with, the Kingdom should free Abdulhadi Al Khawaja, an activist tortured and jailed for his role in peacefully organizing around the 2011 protests. I'm so glad that today we'll be hearing from his daughter Maryam al-Khawaja, who is a leading voice for human rights in Bahrain and throughout the Gulf in her own right, and has led an extraordinary campaign to press for her father's release at great personal risk.

A decade ago, my Deputy Chief of Staff Kate Gould wrote a piece noting that al-Khawaja's release could prevent violent escalation and show respect for a nonviolent movement who have fought and won reforms against all odds. Unfortunately, the same piece could have been written today. But even after more than a decade in prison, Al-Khawaja continues his human rights work, and recently won the Martin Ennells Award for the short stories and books he's written in prison, and the campaigns he continues to lead to improve treatment in prison and free all prisoners of conscience.

My Chief of Staff Geo Saba joined a staff delegation last month and met with various Bahraini officials including the Foreign Minister Dr. Abdullatif bin Rashid Al Zayani and the Justice Minister Nawaf bin Mohammed Al-Ma'awda. He pressed for the release of political prisoners, including Abdulhadi al-Khawaja and another political prisoner who I hope King Al-Khalifa will immediately release: Dr. Abduljalil al-Singace.

Dr. al-Singace is an academic, activist, and blogger imprisoned in Bahrain whose health is declining rapidly. He was also imprisoned for his work organizing for peaceful protests for democratic reform in 2011, and named this year's international writer of courage, part of the PEN Pinter Prize, which goes to an author deemed to have fulfilled Harold Pinter's aspiration to "define the real truth of our lives and our societies."

Both Dr. al-Singace and al-Khawaja, among many other Bahrainis campaigning for their human rights have opened the eyes of the world to the real truth of the Kingdom of Bahrain, and all the election pageantry won't change that. However, by releasing Al-Khawaja and Dr. al-Singace, King Hamad al-Khalifa can demonstrate that the Kingdom is not afraid of those who speak that truth, and can showcase a genuine commitment to true reform.