



Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission Briefing

Bahrain Seven Years Later

Friday, February 16, 2018

10:00 – 11:00 AM

2200 Rayburn House Office Building

Opening Remarks as prepared for delivery

Good morning, and thank you for joining us for the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission's briefing *Bahrain Seven Years Later*.

We have a stellar group of panelists with us today, several of whom have previously appeared before the Commission. They have years of experience working to protect human rights and support democratic reform in Bahrain. I personally appreciate their commitment and their many contributions.

Because we have so much expertise in the room, I will be brief.

This Commission has tracked the human rights situation in Bahrain since 2010. We have hosted briefings and hearings,

issued statements, written letters, and supported prisoners of conscience like Nabeel Rajab. We have consistently encouraged the government to respect the fundamental civil and political rights of all the Bahraini people.

After the 2011 protests, we urged the government to implement the recommendations of the Bahraini Independent Commission of Inquiry (BICI) and other reforms that would satisfy democratic aspirations.

It seemed for a while that progress was being made. But now it is clear not only that reforms have stalled, but that things are going backwards, and repression is escalating.

The major opposition political societies have been outlawed, and hundreds of people have been stripped of their citizenship. Bahrain has resumed the practice of trying civilians in military courts.

This deterioration worries me.

Bahrain is still a major United States ally. The 5th Fleet is still headquartered there. One would think that would give our government leverage, but that presumes sufficient political will to use it.

Meanwhile, a domestic conflict that was originally political has become increasingly sectarian, with regional consequences.

Bahrain's claims of Iranian interference have been effective in quieting some international critics.

We are left with the question of what to do in an international context that feels much less hopeful and less favorable to reform than a few years ago.

But we need to find a way forward. So let's start the discussion.

[Brian Dooley will introduce the panel and moderate.]