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U.S. Congressman Jim McGovern Calls on Bahrain to Release Sheikh Ali Salman

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Today, Congressman James P. McGovern (D-MA), Co-Chair of the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission, called on the government of Bahrain to release opposition leader Sheikh Ali Salman.

Sheikh Ali Salman is the Secretary General of the Al-Wefaq political society in Bahrain and a Twelver Shi'a cleric. He was detained in December 2014 after delivering a series of peaceful speeches calling for political reform. In June 2015, he was sentenced to four years in prison on charges of insulting the Bahraini Interior Ministry and inciting others to break the law, and is jailed in the infamous Jaw Prison. The Sheikh has appealed his conviction, and a verdict is expected this coming Monday.

Sheikh Ali Salman is recognized as a prisoner of conscience with the Defending Freedoms Project, an initiative of the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission, the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, and Amnesty International USA.

In its 2015 Human Rights Report, the State Department described the most serious human rights issues in Bahrain as including citizens' limited ability to peacefully change their government; the lack of due process in the legal system, especially in cases against opposition members and political and human rights activists; and restrictions on free expression and assembly.

“Sheikh Salman’s imprisonment is inconsistent with the Bahraini government’s promises of political reform, and makes an eventual inclusive political settlement less likely,” **said Congressman McGovern**. “The Bahraini authorities have a chance on Monday to reverse the Sheikh’s conviction, and they should take it.”

Last February the U.S. State Department [urged the Sheikh's release](#), and argued that it is important for the government of Bahrain and opposition groups to work together to implement reforms to bring Bahrain into compliance with its international human rights obligations.

“Bahrain must improve its human rights record,” **McGovern added**. “Releasing the Sheikh would be an important step forward.”

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