



January 7, 2019

Timothy A Lenderking
Deputy Assistant Secretary for Arabian Gulf Affairs
Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs
United States Department of State
2201 C Street, NW, Room 6242
Washington, DC 20520

Re: Human Rights Issues for Secretary of State Pompeo to Raise During Trip to the Middle East

Dear Mr. Lenderking;

On behalf of Amnesty International USA (“AIUSA”), and our more than seven million members and supporters worldwide, I am writing to urge you to have Secretary of State Michael Pompeo raise the following human rights issue during his trip to the Middle East. This trip presents an opportunity for the United States to articulate a Middle East policy that is built on universal values and rights for everyone. AI’s top concerns relate to the escalating detention, harassment, and violence against human rights defenders (HRDs) in the region.

We recommend that Secretary Pompeo raise the following crucial human rights issues at every strategic opportunity and meetings whether they be public or private.

AIUSA is greatly concerned about the escalating detention, harassment, and violence against the human rights defenders in the Middle East, particularly in Bahrain, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates. We know from accounts by many former prisoners of conscience that they were released because of interventions by high level U.S. government officials. AIUSA urges you to raise these HRD cases in meetings with the heads of state.

AIUSA is calling for the following human rights defenders to be immediately and unconditionally released in accordance with international human rights law. In addition, authorities should drop all politically-motivated criminal charges and halt the violence and harassment against the HRDs.

Bahrain:

Nabeel Rajab is a prominent human rights defender in Bahrain and is the President of the NGO Bahrain Centre for Human Rights (BCHR). He has been repeatedly targeted for his human rights work and has been in and out of prison since 2012 and on a travel ban since November 2014. Nabeel has been in detention since his arrest on June 13, 2016 and put on trial for posting and re-posting peaceful comments on Twitter regarding the conflict in Yemen and torture in Jaw prison in March 2015. On [December 31, 2018](#), Bahrain's Court of Cassation upheld Nabeel Rajab's conviction and five-year prison sentence.

Egypt:

Amal Fathy is an Egyptian women human rights defender who, was detained on May 11, 2018 for posting a video on Facebook in which she shared her experience of sexual harassment and criticized the government over its failure to address the issue. Amal had been in pre-trial detention until December 27, 2018 when she was released on probation but three days later, on [December 30, 2018](#), an Egyptian court upheld her two-year prison sentence. Amal Fathy's husband is Mohamed Lotfy, a former Amnesty International researcher and the current director of the Egyptian Commission for Rights and Freedoms, an Egyptian human rights NGO.

Hanan Badr el-Din is a [human rights defender](#) from Egypt and is the co-founder of the Families of the Forcibly Disappeared Association. She started her activism following the enforced disappearance of her husband Khalid Ezz el-Din on July 27, 2013. Hanan was detained on May 6, 2017 at Qanatar prison, north of Cairo, when visiting an individual who had been forcibly disappeared in order to find out more about her

husband's fate and whereabouts. She suffers from a serious genetic disorder and her health is rapidly deteriorating.

Saudi Arabia:

At least twelve [Saudi human rights defenders](#), most of them women, have been arbitrarily detained without charge since May 2018 in Dhahban Prison. They have reportedly faced sexual harassment, torture, and other forms of ill-treatment during interrogation. They were repeatedly tortured by electrocution and flogging, leaving some unable to walk or stand properly. In one reported instance, one of the activists was made to hang from the ceiling, and according to another testimony, one of the detained women was reportedly subjected to sexual harassment, by interrogators wearing face masks. These WHRDs may face trial before a counterterrorism court and up to 20 years in prison for their human rights activism. Some of the most prominent HRDs being detained are Loujain al-Hathloul, Nassima al-Sada, Iman al-Nafjan, Aziza al-Yousef, Mohammad al-Bajadi, and Samar Badawi. Samar Badawi was a recipient of the State Department's International Women of Courage Award in 2012 and she is also the sister of prisoner of conscience Raif Badawi (see below). All these human rights defender must be released immediately and unconditionally, and any human rights abuses committed against them, be properly and impartially investigated, and hold those responsible accountable.

Raif Badawi is a Saudi Arabian blogger who founded an online forum for political and social debate, called "Saudi Arabian Liberals." He was arrested on June 17, 2012 and has been detained since then in a prison in Jeddah. He was charged with violating Saudi Arabia's information technology law and insulting Islamic religious figures. Raif was [sentenced](#) to 1,000 lashes and 10 years in prison, and received his first 50 lashes on January 9, 2015. Amnesty considers Raif a prisoner of conscience and is seeking his immediate and unconditional release.

Waleed Abu al-Khiri is a human rights lawyer in Saudi Arabia serving a 15-year sentence solely for his [peaceful activism](#). Waleed has endured years of harassment

and intimidation after founding in 2008, the Monitor of Human Rights in Saudi Arabia, one of the few local NGOs documenting human rights violations in the country. He also provided legal representation to prominent prisoner of conscience Raif Badawi (highlighted above). Waleed says that he has been repeatedly [harassed, beaten, and endured ill-treatment](#) while in prison.

United Arab Emirates:

Ahmed Mansoor is a prominent human rights defender who received the prestigious Martin Annals' Award for Human Rights Defenders in 2015. He is a member of the advisory committee of the NGO Human Rights Watch's Middle East and North Africa Division, as well as of the advisory board of the organization Gulf Centre for Human Rights (GCHR). He has documented the human rights situation in the UAE since 2006 and has publicly spoken out in defense of international human rights on his blog, via social media and in interviews with international media. Up until his arrest on 20 March 2017, Ahmed Mansoor was the last human rights defender in the UAE who had been able to criticize the authorities publicly. On May 29, 2018, Ahmed was convicted and sentenced to 10 years in prison for posts he made on Facebook and Twitter. On [December 31, 2018](#), the Federal Supreme Court of the United Arab Emirates upheld the conviction and 10-year prison sentence.

Thank you for your consideration of these critical pressing human rights issues. For more information or any questions you may have, please contact Philippe Nassif, Advocacy Director for the Middle East and North Africa, at 202- 768-5547 or PNassif@aiusa.org.

Sincerely,

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