



human rights *first*

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U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street Northwest
Washington, DC 20520

June 7, 2016

Dear Assistant Secretary Patterson:

I am writing to urge you to submit to Congress, as a priority matter, the department's congressionally-mandated assessment of the extent to which the Bahraini government has implemented the recommendations of the 2011 Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry (BICI) report. This assessment, now more than four months overdue, comes at a time when the human rights situation in Bahrain is steadily worsening. Its timely release would serve as an important signal that the U.S. government views meaningful political reforms and respect for human rights as integral to ensuring stability and security in Bahrain.

The Senate report from the Committee on Appropriations regarding the Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Appropriations Bill, 2016 (Report No. 114-79), which was incorporated into the final omnibus bill enacted on December 18, 2015, states the following:

“Not later than 45 days after enactment of the act, the Secretary of State shall submit a report to the appropriate congressional committees describing the specific steps taken by the Government of Bahrain to implement the recommendations in the 2011 Report of the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry, including further steps the government should take to fully implement the recommendations and an assessment of the impact of the findings of the Report for U.S. security in the region.”

This report was due to Congress on February 1, 2016, yet the Department of State has not yet furnished this report.

As the situation in Bahrain continues to deteriorate, Human Rights First is deeply concerned about this delay. We share the Department of State's consternation regarding the recent sentencing of the secretary general of Al Wefaq, Sheikh Ali Salman, to nine years in prison. As Department Spokesperson John Kirby stated on May 31, 2016, “[N]o one should be prosecuted or imprisoned for engaging in peaceful expression or assembly.”

Members of Congress are keenly awaiting the receipt of this report as they ponder co-sponsorship of the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry (BICI) Accountability Act of 2015 (S.2009 and H.R.3445). This bill would prohibit the U.S. government from selling or transferring to Bahrain specified weapons and crowd control items until the Department of State certifies that Bahrain has fully implemented all 26 recommendations set forth in the 2011 BICI report.

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For too long, the U.S. government has failed to adequately respond to the Bahraini government's crushing of peaceful dissent, rewarding the regime with more arms without regard for its failure to implement the reforms it committed to in 2011.

June 29 will mark the one-year anniversary of the Department of State's decision to lift the holds on security assistance to the Bahrain Defense Force and National Guard that were implemented following Bahrain's crackdown on demonstrations in 2011. The release of this long-overdue report will be a vital step in reassessing this relationship and advancing the U.S. government's efforts toward meaningful progress on human rights reforms and political reconciliation in Bahrain.

Sincerely,

Brian Dooley
Director, Human Rights Defenders