



American ideals. Universal values.

January 7, 2015

The Honorable William V. Roebuck
Office of the U.S. Ambassador to Bahrain
American Embassy, Manama, Bahrain
Building No. 979 Road 3119, Block 331
Zinj District, Manama, Bahrain

Dear Ambassador Roebuck:

Congratulations on your new position in Manama. This is a challenging time for the U.S.-Bahrain relationship, and we wish you well in encouraging the government of Bahrain to stabilize the difficult environment by taking steps towards more inclusive politics.

Unfortunately, since the November elections the Bahrain government has done just the opposite. We watched with alarm as Bahrain authorities moved against leading civil society figures, sentencing activists to prison and arresting and charging opposition leader Sheikh Ali Salman with speech-related offenses. We have urged the government to drop the charges against him and release him immediately.

The U.S. government has recognized that Sheikh Ali Salman's arrest could inflame tensions. But despite the fact that he appears to have been detained for exercising his right to free expression, it has not called for his release. We urge you to do so, and we hope you will take a public interest in this and other cases in which people have been targeted for exercising their freedoms of expression, assembly, or association.

One way to demonstrate such interest would be to send a representative from the embassy to the court hearings in the Ali Salman case and to assess—and state publicly—whether the process met international fair trial standards. I know from my own experience in observing Bahrain court hearings in 2012 that this is not always the case.

The coming weeks are likely to be particularly sensitive and important. Apart from the Ali Salman case, we expect a verdict to be issued on January 20 in the case of prominent human rights defender Nabeel Rajab, who has been charged with offending government ministries via Twitter. And the anniversary of the outbreak of widespread protests for reform on February 14, 2011 is around the corner.

We urge you to use your first few weeks in Bahrain to make clear through your meetings, public statements, and actions that the U.S. government supports and will seek to protect peaceful civil society activists facing harassment by the government. Particularly during this period, it will be

important to remind the government of Bahrain and the Bahraini people that President Obama has made support for a strong and independent civil society a priority in U.S. foreign policy—in Bahrain and in every other country.

Thank you for meeting with my colleague, Brian Dooley, last month in Washington. We look forward to working with you in the coming weeks and years to foster an inclusive, non-sectarian future for Bahrain in which all people can exercise their human rights freely without fear of intimidation and violence.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Elisa Massimino". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Elisa Massimino
President and CEO