



Visit of Catherine Ashton to Bahrain: a test case for the EU's human rights policy!

Brussels, Paris, Geneva, April 19, 2011

Ms. High Representative,

Your visit to the Gulf region is scheduled at a moment where the core and universal values which the EU supports and which the Bahraini authorities have adhered to are being blatantly violated and our organisations witness a severe crackdown on human rights defenders, trade unionists and opposition activists in Bahrain.

In particular, around 600 people, including human rights defenders, political leaders, trade unionists, doctors, paramedics and clerics have been arrested since February 2011. The whereabouts of a significant number of them, including human rights defender **Abdulhadi Al Khawaja** and lawyer **Mohamed Issa Al Tajer**, remain unknown and access to them, including by their lawyers, is not guaranteed for the majority of these detainees.

Concern about the physical and psychological integrity of those arrested is high, in particular after four people arrested during the protests have died in custody between April 3 and 12, 2011.

In addition, some 2,000 workers in 30 mainly government enterprises have been sacked in the past two weeks for joining trade union actions in support of dialogue and an end to violence, including six members of the Executive of the General Federation of Bahraini Trade Unions (GFBTU). This number is increasing every day.

In this context, our organisations call you to subject your visit to Bahrain to an opportunity to meet Bahraini human rights defenders and trade unionists, in particular to:

- Visit Bahraini detained human rights defenders Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja, former MENA Coordinator of Frontline and lawyer Mohamed Issa Al Tajer, in their place of detention,
- Meet the families of detained defenders and Bahraini human rights defenders, who are not in prison, in particular Messrs. **Nabeel Rajab**, President Bahrain Center for Human Rights (BCHR) and / Deputy Secretary general of FIDH, **Mohammed al-Maskati**, President of the Bahrain Youth Human Rights Society (BYHRS), **Abdulla Alderazi**, Secretary General of the Bahrain Human Rights Society (BHRS) and **Abdulnabi Alekri** from Transparency Bahrain,
- Meet representatives of the General Federation of Bahraini Trade Unions (GFBTU),
- Repeat publicly your call for the immediate release of all of those who have been arbitrarily detained including human rights defenders,
- Encourage EU missions in Bahrain to take an active role in monitoring the whereabouts and conditions of human rights defenders and trade unionists and to make regular contacts with the above mentioned organisations.

Thanking you for your attention to our pressing request, we remain at your disposal to facilitate any of the above.

Your sincerely,

Souhayr Belhassen
FIDH President



Eric Sottas
OMCT Secretary General



Sharan Burrow
ITUC General Secretary

