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**Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to
the special session of the General Assembly entitled “Women
2000: gender equality, development and peace for the
twenty-first century”**

Statement submitted by Americans for Democracy and Human Rights in Bahrain, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.



Statement

Americans for Democracy and Human Rights in Bahrain, in coordination with the Bahrain Centre for Human Rights and the Bahrain Institute for Human Rights, would like to take the occasion of the fifty-ninth session of the Commission on the Status of Women to draw attention to the position of women human rights defenders, peaceful protesters and non-aligned medical practitioners in Bahrain. Since February 2011, the Government of Bahrain has persecuted women for their role in protest movements and their status as human rights defenders.

In the past two months, the Government of Bahrain has arbitrarily arrested two women human rights defenders in the country. On 30 August, Maryam al-Khawaja returned to Bahrain to visit her ailing father, Abdulhadi al-Khawaja. Mr. al-Khawaja himself is an imprisoned Bahraini human rights defender whose health had deteriorated as a result of a hunger strike. Upon arriving in Bahrain, Maryam found herself accosted by government security forces, who arrested her on charges of assaulting a government security officer. The international community widely condemned the arrest as an act of retaliation against Maryam's peaceful advocacy for human rights in her country. Although the Government eventually released Maryam on bail, her trial is still scheduled to continue.

On 14 October, Maryam's sister, Zeinab al-Khawaja, appeared in court on charges of insulting the King of Bahrain in relation to an event during which she had torn a picture of him in half. Insulting the King carries a maximum sentence of seven years in prison in Bahrain. When she addressed the court, Zeinab refused to recognize the legitimacy of the charges, stating that it was her guaranteed right to engage in peaceful political expression. She then tore another picture of the King in two, after which the judge ordered the courtroom vacated and Zeinab arrested. Zeinab had previously been imprisoned for one year on charges also relating to freedom of expression. She is currently eight months pregnant, and will likely give birth to her child in prison. Zeinab will be the first Bahraini woman to do so.

Zeinab and Maryam al-Khawaja are not the only women who have been arbitrarily imprisoned or otherwise abused by the Government of Bahrain. In April 2013, Bahraini security forces arrested Rihanna al-Mosawi and Nafeesa al-Asfoor in connection with their participation in a sit-in protest against the presence of the Formula One Grand Prix. At her trial three months later, Rihanna informed the court that she had been stripped naked on two separate occasions during the period of her interrogation, and that interrogators had repeatedly threatened to rape her. While visitors inside the court grew audibly distressed at this news, the judge only recorded that she had lodged a complaint of "morally improper treatment".

During the 2011 protests, Bahraini women braved repression even as their widespread participation invited a forceful government response. They organized all-women rallies in solidarity with imprisoned human rights defenders and actively participated in society and politics. Others sought to assist their fellow citizens as doctors and nurses. The latter activity drew significant scrutiny from Bahraini forces, which began to persecute medical professionals such as Rula al-Saffar, a professor and President of the Bahrain Nursing Society. During an episode of intense government repression in 2011, she volunteered to save lives at Salmaniya hospital, a selfless act for which she was arrested. She suffered torture at the hands of interrogators, and a military court sentenced her to 15 years of imprisonment.

Released five months later on bail, she continues to assist wounded protesters and is involved in movements to free prisoners of conscience in Bahrain.

At the fifty-ninth session of the Commission on the Status of Women, Americans for Democracy and Human Rights in Bahrain invites the Commission to thoroughly examine the central role that women have played in the ongoing effort to call attention to human rights abuses in Bahrain. In addition, Americans for Democracy and Human Rights in Bahrain calls upon the Commission to recognize those women who have survived imprisonment and torture for the sake of their ideals, and to take positive steps towards the full realization of their right not to be subjected to arbitrary detention and torture.
