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ADVANCING FREEDOM FOR 70 YEARS

Ambassador Houda Ezra Nonoo
Ambassador of the Kingdom of Bahrain to the United States
3502 International Drive, NW
Washington, DC 20008

November 26, 2012

Dear Madame Ambassador:

We are writing in response to your invitation to attend Bahrain's annual Independence Day celebration. We will not be attending the event and want to take this opportunity to explain why.

As you are well aware, Freedom House has been critical of your government's repression in the face of peaceful demonstrations by pro-democracy and human rights advocates. We and other internationally respected human rights groups have chronicled over the past 21 months the violent crackdown on Bahraini citizens exercising their fundamental rights.

In our view it would be exceptionally inappropriate for us to take part in a celebration of the country's independence while your government continues its unabated assault on courageous men and women calling for democracy, respect for human rights, and the establishment of the rule of law. Indeed thousands of democracy activists have been unjustly imprisoned and subject to torture and inhumane treatment, including leading human rights campaigner Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja and his daughter Zainab, winners of this year's Freedom Award from Freedom House (along with a second daughter Maryam, who is in political exile).

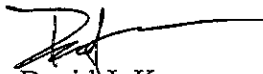
This is a time for your government to focus on ending human rights abuses and pursuing political reconciliation; it is assuredly not a time to host a lavish party while turning a deaf ear to the demands of a majority of your citizens for basic civil and political rights. The energy and resources of the government of Bahrain would be more fruitfully directed toward addressing the legitimate and long-ignored grievances of its citizens surrounding the perpetuation of authoritarian rule.

Recent developments underscore the incongruity of celebrating while the country remains in the throes of political upheaval rooted in the absence of accountable governing structures, the hallmark of a democratic system. The recent ban on all demonstrations makes a mockery of the government's professed commitment to undertake recommendations for reform as outlined by the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry, which issued its report almost exactly a year ago. The

government has undertaken a few cosmetic changes seemingly designed to mollify the international community while failing to implement important steps called for by the BICI, such as ending impunity for the security forces, relaxing censorship, and allowing effective prison monitoring. Indeed, in recent weeks Bahrain has taken new steps to repress its citizens, including banning “unlicensed” demonstrations and stripping 31 opposition members of their citizenship. The system built on the denial of basic freedoms and monopoly of power by the royal family remains intact.

Marking the country’s independence would have much deeper meaning if the Bahraini people were free to exercise their basic rights and live in a society governed by democratic norms and institutions in which the rule of law prevails. We will continue to raise our voice in support of those Bahrainis who are committed to that path.

Respectfully,



David J. Kramer,
President, Freedom House



Robert Heyman
Vice President for Regional Programs, Freedom House