

HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH

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Sacha Woodward Hill, General Counsel
6 Princes Gate
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6 February 2019

Dear Ms. Woodward-Hill,

We, the undersigned organisations, are writing to raise our concerns regarding the allegations of the Bahrain authorities' arbitrary detention, torture and unlawful conviction of Bahraini female activist and blogger, Najah Yusuf, who was sentenced in June 2018 to three years imprisonment for her social media activity. Bahrain's High Criminal Court cited Ms. Yusuf's peaceful criticism of the Bahrain Grand Prix 2017 in the judgement against her.

In April 2017, according to a written statement by Ms. Yusuf, officers from the Bahraini National Security Agency (NSA) [allegedly interrogated](#) and subjected her to physical abuse, sexual assault and psychological torture a week after she released a series of posts critical of the 2017 Bahrain Grand Prix. Shortly thereafter, Ms. Yusuf maintains that she was forced to sign a prepared confession.

Ms. Yusuf raised her abuses during her trial and submitted complaints to oversight bodies, but she told the Bahrain Institute for Rights and Democracy (BIRD) that the bodies failed to follow up and never informed her or her family of any developments in the investigation. National oversight bodies in Bahrain mandated to investigate human rights violations have been internationally criticised, with the UN Committee Against Torture notably [describing](#) these institutions as “*not effective*” and “*not independent*”. Despite her allegations and her repeated attempts to convey her ordeal to the authorities, the Bahraini government continues to [insist](#) that Ms. Yusuf was “*guaranteed due process*”.

Ms. Yusuf's conviction and sentence violate her right to freedom of expression. The evidence submitted by the public prosecution against her heavily relies on her social media posts expressing her opposition to the Formula One races being held in Bahrain due to what she said were the government's use of the races to whitewash its human rights violations, as well as her calling for a "*Freedom for the Formula One Detainees*" march in solidarity with protesters who were arrested by security forces in previous years for criticizing the Bahrain Grand Prix. The court judgment against Ms. Najah also cites her posts opposing the Formula One races in her conviction.

Although the court judgment also cites footage that depicts protesters behaving violently, Ms. Yusuf maintains that she was not involved in these posts as she was one of multiple individuals who had access to the account. However, the court relied on Ms. Yusuf's own confession, which she maintains was obtained under duress, stating that she managed the social media pages on which these videos appeared and was the person who posted them.

We were encouraged by the [concern expressed](#) by Formula One in November over Ms. Yusuf's imprisonment. The Bahrain government's [response](#) to Formula One, however, asserting that rights to freedom of opinion, expression and assembly are upheld "*robustly*" and that "*no one is detained for expressing their political views*" and that, as the Bahrain Embassy in London [stated](#), Ms. Yusuf's conviction has "*absolutely no relation*" to Formula One, indicate that the Bahraini authorities have not yet taken Formula One's concerns and enquiries on her case seriously.

In keeping with the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development's [\(OECD\)](#) Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises, Formula One has a duty to prevent or mitigate adverse human rights impacts resulting from your business operation. Formula One's own policy also requires that you consider the human rights impact of your activities and conduct the necessary due diligence. This is reinforced by the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights which [states](#) that business enterprises have a responsibility to "*avoid causing or contributing to adverse human rights impacts through their own activities*", "*address such impacts when they occur*" and "*seek to prevent them.*"

In light of the above, we urge your organisation to uphold its [commitment](#) to human rights by publicly calling on the Bahraini authorities to drop the charges against Ms. Yusuf related to her exercise of her right to free speech, release her immediately, and to hold any individuals responsible for her ill-treatment or torture to account. We also urge you to disclose any information revealed during your enquiries with Bahrain on Ms. Yusuf's case.

Yours sincerely,

1. Bahrain Institute for Rights and Democracy (BIRD)
2. Human Rights Watch (HRW)
3. International Service for Human Rights (ISHR)
4. Americans for Democracy and Human Rights in Bahrain (ADHRB)
5. European Centre for Democracy and Human Rights (ECDHR)
6. Women's Rights in Development (AWID)
7. English PEN
8. Gulf Centre for Human Rights (GC4HR)
9. Urgent Action Fund
10. El Nadim center for management and rehabilitation of victims of violence
11. PEN International
12. The World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT)
13. Bahrain Centre for Human Rights (BCHR)
14. Women's March Global
15. Reporters Without Borders (RSF)
16. Redress
17. Index On Censorship