

AGM of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Democracy and Human Rights in the Gulf

Portcullis House

7 June 2022 | 11am - 12pm

Attendees

Parliamentarians:

1. Brendan O'Hara MP
2. Lord Scriven
3. Baroness Stern
4. Wayne David MP
5. Sir Peter Bottomley MP
6. Alistair Carmichael MP
7. Baroness Brinton

NGO Representatives:

8. Rothna Begum, Human Rights Watch
9. Sima Watling, Amnesty International
10. Sayed Ahmed Alwadaei, Bahrain Institute for Rights and Democracy
11. Josie Thum, Bahrain Institute for Rights and Democracy

Follow up action

- APPG members to consider signing the [EDM 107](#), "Dr al-Singace's hunger strike and political prisoners in Bahrain".
- Brendan O'Hara MP to write to Bahrain oversight bodies on Dr AlSingace on the APPG's behalf.
- APPG members to consider signing the open letter to the trade secretary calling for human rights clauses to be included in any trade agreement with GCC states.
- Secretariat to register the APPG and the outcome of the election.

Item 1 - Election of Officers

- Subject of group will remain to promote and protect human rights and democracy in the Gulf
- Unanimous vote in favour of the following positions:

Chair of APPG	Brendan O'Hara MP
Vice-Chairs	Lord Scriven
	Baroness Stern
	Sir Peter Bottomley MP
	Alistair Carmichael MP
	Andrew Gwynne MP
	Andy Slaughter MP
	Chris Law MP
	Wayne David MP
Treasurer	Martyn Day MP
Members	Layla Moran MP
	Fiona Bruce MP

	Caroline Lucas MP
	Baroness Bennett of Manor Castle
Secretariat & Public Enquiry Point	Josie Thum, Bahrain Institute for Rights and Democracy

Item 2 - Discussion

- *Brendan O'Hara MP*: Last year's performance was particularly successful despite Covid.
- *Lord Scriven*: Going forward the APPG should consider the World Cup in Qatar and the role of Universities and what due diligence they have been conducting around their training to the Gulf.
- *Sayed Ahmed Alwadaei*: Thanks to the APPG for their efforts to end judicial harassment against my wife. The Free Trade Agreement upcoming between the GCC and the UK will be a major event this year. Political prisoners like Dr AlSingace remain in very dire situations and the oversight bodies' are playing important roles.
- *Josie Thum*: Can APPG members consider signing the [EDM 107](#) on the urgent case of Dr Abduljalil AlSingace? Also to keep in mind there will be pseudo-elections in Bahrain, with political leaders still imprisoned, repression and violations are likely to surround the elections.
 - *Lord Scriven*: Let's send a letter from the APPG to the oversight bodies about this case, if Brendan sends it it will be on behalf of the whole group.
- *Brendan O'Hara MP*: The APPG should look into initiatives on each Gulf country.
 - *Lord Scriven*: Over the next couple of meetings the group can have country-based debates to see where it would be best to get involved.
 - *Brendan O'Hara MP*: This would be a good opportunity, the country of focus can be rotated.

Item 3 - NGO Briefings

Human Rights Watch - [Rothna Begum](#)

- *Rothna Begum*:
 - Saudi Arabia: Civic space quelled for human rights activism. 2018 US intelligence report concluded that MBS approved the murder of Jamal Khashoggi, with no meaningful accountability for this crime.
 - Human rights activist Mohammed al-Rabea, aid worker Abdulrahman al-Sadhan and female physician Dr Lina AlSharif are currently in prison, whilst blogger Raif Badawi and women's rights activist Lina AlHathloul remain under a travel ban.
 - Saudi authorities conducted the largest mass execution in recent Saudi history. On March 12, they executed 81 men, 41 of whom are members of the Shia minority, the majority of which for non-lethal offences. Despite this, the UK Prime Minister visited the country days later.
 - GCC states continue to severely discriminate against women, including limiting a woman's right to marry, divorce, inherit, and pass on citizenship to her children on an equal basis with men.
 - Reforms in Saudi have only come after decades of women's rights activism.

- The male guardianship system remains intact. A Family Code passed in March codifies discrimination against women.
 - Migrant workers live under the abusive immigration sponsorship system, kafala, which ties workers' legal status to their employer, facilitating abuse.
 - GCC states should release all human rights defenders and lift any travel bans on them.
 - The death penalty must be ended along with discrimination in law and practice against women. Male guardianship over women and the kafala system should be abolished
- *Brendan O'Hara MP*: The APPG will continue to collaborate with Human Rights Watch.

Amnesty International - *Sima Watling*

- *Sima Watling*: In the UAE, they have completely silenced dissent since 2011. Mass trial of 94 people: 5 imprisoned individuals, that Amnesty have named as prisoners of conscience, have been held past the end of their sentences since March 2022 and were signatories to a 2011 petition calling for a democratic parliament in the UAE. Those tried under terror law their detention has been extended, can be indefinite.
 - So far, out of the 15 'UAE-94' defendants whose sentences are over, the UAE has only released one of these individuals from detention.
 - Ahmed Mansoor still in solitary confinement
- In Qatar, on 10 May, two lawyers were sentenced to life imprisonment for their opposition to a law that the Emir ratified last year regarding elections to the Shura Council. This law discriminates against members of the Murrah tribe.
- In Kuwait, freedom of expression is curtailed but it is often difficult to follow up on cases as they are not named. For example, there are reports of individuals being handed 5 years' imprisonment for criticising Saudi Arabia or other neighbouring countries on Twitter but the details are not available.
 - Mention of the discrimination against the Bidun (stateless community).