



American Islamic Congress

2 May 2012

Khalifa Bin Mohamed Al Khalifa
Director of Human Rights Organisations
Ministry of Human Rights and Social Development
P.O. Box 32868
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Kingdom of Bahrain
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Dear Khalifa Bin Mohamed Al Khalifa,

With reference to your letter to Ms. Courtney Radsch of Freedom House dated 30 April 2012, we are dismayed at your Ministry's reversal of its decision to permit the visit of an international delegation, affiliated with the International Freedom of Expression Exchange (IFEX), to visit the Kingdom of Bahrain from 6-10 May 2012.

While the mission team has complied with the Ministry's standard procedures for entry to the country, new rules introduced in the middle of the process only contribute to a lack of transparency in Bahrain's visa process. Yesterday's rejection is merely another testament to promises broken by officials.

As you know, an IFEX-led delegation was allowed entry into Bahrain from 20-30 November 2011. The group was pleased to meet with Hon. Minister Dr Fatima Al-Balooshi and the cross-departmental Human Rights Committee. Delegation members heard the proposals of reforms surrounding the findings of the BICI report. Allowing international organizations to enter the country was a recurring theme in conversation, and the delegation was pleased to acknowledge and to accept the Minister's invitation to our organizations to return to Bahrain in the new year. We were respectful of the process, as requested by officials, but were prevented from entering the country. Our request for a follow-up visit by representatives from Freedom House, the Gulf

Centre for Human Rights, Index of Censorship, PEN International, the Committee to Protect Journalists, Reporters Without Borders along with a freelance journalist, from 6-10 May was approved by your Ministry on 11 April 2012, and you kindly offered to facilitate meetings with government officials.

We are extremely disappointed by your ministry's unwillingness to engage in serious dialogue on issues of human rights and freedom of expression and can only view this decision as a deliberate effort to undermine transparent reporting by independent observers and limit their access to the country. This move appears to be an attempt by the government to sever direct links between international human rights organizations on one hand and Bahraini human rights defenders and activists. We also believe this fundamentally calls into question the government's commitment to meaningful reform.

Since your ministry has chosen to revoke permission for a visit at the last moment we will be forced to cancel our trip. Rest assured our organizations will raise awareness about this situation with policymakers and media, and that half-hearted last-minute protestations that this is not a politically motivated denial of entry to respected freedom of expression groups will not be sufficient.

Signed,

Freedom House
Gulf Centre for Human Rights
Index of Censorship
PEN International
Committee to Protect Journalists
Reporters Without Borders
American Islamic Congress
Clare Morgana Gillis, freelance journalist

cc.

H.E. Ambassador Houda Nonoo, Ambassador to the United States of America

H.E. Ambassador Alice al-Sammaan, Ambassador to the United Kingdom

c/o Hussain Makhloq, First Secretary, Embassy of Bahrain