Secretary Hilda Solis U.S. Department of Labor 200 Constitution Ave., NW Washington, DC 20210

Via E-mail: Executivesecretariat@dol.gov

Dear Secretary Solis:

We are writing as organizations intimately involved in supporting the aspirations of Bahrainis to advance democracy and human rights in their country. Among our core concerns have been the documented violations of the fundamental labor rights of Bahraini trade unionists, health care workers and teachers, for which the International Labor Organization and the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry have called for remedial actions.

We were initially encouraged when the Department of Labor (DOL) formally agreed to examine Bahrain's compliance with its worker rights obligations under the U.S.-Bahrain Free Trade Agreement (FTA), in connection with a complaint filed by the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO). Our counterparts in Bahrain were similarly encouraged by the DOL's action in part because the review process is based on procedures that both the Government of Bahrain and the Government of the United States are obligated to follow. Indeed, Bahrain human and labor rights activists devoted serious efforts to assist DOL teams who visited Bahrain as a part of their investigation, despite the potential risks for them.

As you are aware, the U.S.-Bahrain FTA entered into force in August 2006. Chapter 15 of the agreement specifies that the parties reaffirm their commitments under the International Labor Organization Declaration on Fundamental Principles at Work and Follow-Up, including the right of association and the right to organize and bargain collectively. The FTA obligates each party to "strive to ensure that such labor principles ... are recognized and protected by its law." It further requires both parties to "effectively enforce" national labor laws protecting the exercise of freedom of association, and to "ensure that proceedings ... for the enforcement of its labor laws are fair, equitable and transparent."

The complaint under consideration calls for termination of the FTA with Bahrain, given Bahrain's alleged non-compliance with provisions related to workers' rights. While our groups, with the exception of the AFL-CIO and the American Federation of Teachers, do not take a position on international commerce or trade agreements per se, we believe that when trading arrangements exist, they should include meaningful, enforceable protections for workers' human rights. In the case of Bahrain, under U.S.

law the DOL has jurisdiction to review compliance with free trade agreement provisions and issue a report to an Interagency Committee. Now, more than a year after the formal acceptance of the FTA complaint, and given that we understand the DOL has investigated and drafted a report on the issue, we are extremely concerned that the Department of Labor has failed to release its findings to the Interagency Committee.

Serious and escalating violence and violations of human and labor rights continue in Bahrain. We believe this lack of progress risks sending a signal to both Bahraini civil society and to the Bahraini Government that the U.S. government is not serious about the promotion of human and labor rights in Bahrain.

It is incumbent that the U.S. Government issue its findings immediately, restating the USG's commitment to these universal labor and human rights principles, and both countries' obligations to respect core labor rights under the bilateral FTA.

Sincerely,







Human Rights First



Human Rights Watch









Project On Middle East Democracy



Solidarity Center, AFL-CIO