



November 18, 2011

Hillary Rodham Clinton
Secretary of State
US Department of State
Harry S. Truman Building
2201 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Clinton:

The world has watched with excitement and exhilaration as young people across the Middle East have stood bravely for the ideals of freedom and liberty that are also expressed in the American Constitution and in our Declaration of Independence. Hope for the future remains high, along with trepidation at the challenges and obstacles to freedom that remain ahead.

As American writers, we are deeply mindful of the importance of freedom of expression that is the American ideal. In that spirit, we wish to draw your attention to the case of Ayat al-Qarmezhi, a twenty-year-old poet who has been sentenced to one year in prison in Bahrain for the recitation of a poem calling for freedom at a pro-reform rally in Manama's Pearl Roundabout in February, 2011. She has since been released from prison, though she must still "appeal" her pending prison sentence on November 21st.

Ayat was forced to turn herself in after authorities harassed her family repeatedly and reportedly threatened to kill her brothers. She alleges that she has been beaten and tortured with electric shocks, all for the crime of crying out, in words, an affirmation for freedom which is the universal right and aspiration of all human beings. The words of her poem require an answer: "We are the people who will kill humiliation and assassinate misery. Don't you hear their cries, don't you hear their screams?"

We hear Ayat's screams and urge you to hear them too, and to direct the powers of your office for her release. We are concerned that the US military relationship with Bahrain's unelected government may be coming at the expense of our support for democracy activists in the country. The sentencing of Ayat al-Qarmezhi and countless others requires us to take a stand for their freedom. They were sentenced for political "crimes" – actions which are not crimes at all by the standard that America, at its best, represents. This is a standard that that you have eloquently supported on many occasions.

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We urge you to use the power of your office to secure Ayat's freedom and the freedom of so many other peaceful reform activists. US foreign policy should be aligned with the Bahraini people who are seeking political reform and freedom.

Sincerely,

Khaled Hosseini
Author of *The Kite Runner* and *A Thousand Splendid Suns*

Nafisa Haji
Author of *The Writing on My Forehead* and *The Sweetness of Tears*

Aisha Sultan
Journalist

Susanne Pari
Author of *The Fortune Catcher*