

Human Rights Watch

Torture, Former Combatants, Political Prisoners, Terror Suspects, & Terrorists

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/03/25/joint-ngo-letter-formula-1-bahrain-grand-prix>

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Dear Stefano Domenicali,

We, the undersigned organizations, are writing to you in your capacity as the new CEO of Formula 1 to reiterate our concerns about Bahrain's use of the Bahrain Grand Prix to sportswash the country's dire human rights record, in light of continuing government repression as well as abuses linked to the 2020 race.

We are disappointed that F1 management has so far failed to address human rights concerns linked to F1 activities in Bahrain. In light of this failure, we strongly encourage you to commission an independent inquiry into the human rights implications of F1's presence in the country, in particular those abuses linked to F1's activities in Bahrain.

10 Years of Repression Since the Arab Spring

In 2011 the Bahrain Grand Prix was [canceled](#) amid international outcry over the Bahraini government's brutal suppression of the country's Arab Spring pro-democracy movement, in which security forces killed dozens and imprisoned thousands more for joining protests, as documented by the [Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry](#).

F1 racing resumed in Bahrain the following year, and over the decade since, the human rights situation in the country has only worsened. Any semblance of democracy has been abandoned as the government outlawed opposition political parties, forcibly closed Bahrain's only independent newspaper and severely curtailed freedom of assembly, forbidding unlicensed gatherings of more than five people. This has included suppressing protests against the Bahrain Grand Prix year after year. [Human rights defenders](#), [politicians](#), [lawyers](#) and other civil society figures face routine harassment and often jail time on spurious charges by Bahraini authorities.

Since Bahrain reinstated the death penalty in 2017, the state has carried out six [executions](#) and according to the Bahrain Institute for Rights and Democracy (BIRD) and Reprieve, at least 26 individuals currently face imminent execution, of whom 11 allege having been tortured.

Intensifying Crackdown in 2021

In an [interview](#) with CNN during the Bahrain Grand Prix, your predecessor Chase Carey stressed that F1 is proud to partner with Bahrain and that this partnership was, in fact, advancing human rights issues in the country. Carey's statement, which was made despite the findings of respected international human rights organizations, including [Human Rights Watch](#) and Amnesty International on the deterioration of human rights in Bahrain, was a public relations boon for Bahrain's rulers.

In February 2021, as Bahrainis prepared to mark a decade since the 2011 uprising, arrests by security forces included at least [13 children](#), some of whom were beaten and threatened with rape and electrocution to coerce them into signing confessions. The youngest boy, who celebrated his 12th birthday in a prison cell, was arrested for joining protests against the November 2020 Bahrain Grand Prix. Four of these children were subsequently [handed](#) six-month non-custodial sentences over protest-related charges, including a seriously ill 16-year-old with severe sickle cell anemia.

Another person arrested during the anniversary crackdown was **Abdulhadi Mushaima**, whose 21-year-old son Ali was the first person killed by police during the 2011 uprising and who has faced years of judicial harassment over his pursuit of justice for his son's murder. Abdulhadi was eventually [released](#) from detention on a non-custodial sentence after being handed three months in prison for joining a peaceful [protest](#) in 2019. Nonetheless, his prosecution is indicative of Bahrain's continued intolerance for dissent and persecution of peaceful protesters.

On March 11, 2021 members of the European Parliament [overwhelmingly](#) adopted a [resolution](#) condemning human rights abuses in

Bahrain; the Greens-European Free Alliance bloc [made explicit calls](#) for EU member states not to attend and participate in the upcoming Formula 1 Gulf Air Bahrain Grand Prix 2021, an example of growing international concern over sports-washing.

F1s Responsibility

In 2015, following Bahrain's violent suppression of protests [against](#) the race, F1 adopted a [human rights policy](#) after arbitration with Americans for Democracy and Human Rights in Bahrain (ADHRB) that committed F1 to identify any actual or potential adverse human rights impacts "linked to F1s activities or business relationships and engage in meaningful consultation with relevant stakeholders."

Despite this commitment, rights abuses linked to F1s activities in the country have continued, while victims' appeals for restitution have gone unrealized. Among them is [Najah Yusuf](#), who was tortured, sexually assaulted, and sentenced to three years in prison after posting criticism of the Grand Prix on social media in 2017. After she was granted a royal pardon in August 2019 following an [international campaign](#) for her release, the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention (WGAD) [declared](#) her imprisonment to be arbitrary and recommended that Najah be accorded an enforceable right to compensation and other reparations. F1 [pledged](#) to raise her case directly with Bahraini authorities after her release.

Almost two years later, the WGAD's recommendation remains unfulfilled and Najah has been fired from her public sector job over her time spent in prison. Her 17-year old son, **Kameel Juma Hasan**, is facing over 25 years in prison stemming from his participation in political protests, in what Amnesty International has [called](#) a reprisal against his mother for speaking out about her ordeal. To date, there is no indication that F1's promised interventions on her behalf have taken place.

Najah is not alone in facing reprisals after protesting against Formula 1. In 2017, Bahrain [jailed](#) family members of UK-based human rights defender and director of the Bahrain Institute for Rights and Democracy (BIRD), Sayed Ahmed Alwadaei, who had participated in the 2015 mediation with F1, in what the WGAD [described](#) as acts of reprisal for his human rights work in the UK.

Formula 1 has yet to respond to letters 30 members of parliament and 18 NGOs sent, before the November 2020 Bahrain Grand Prix, raising these cases. Such failure to respond violates Article 2(d) of F1's human rights policy, which requires that F1 engage in meaningful consultation with relevant stakeholders in relation to any issues raised as a result of our due diligence, where appropriate.

The F1 world champion, Sir Lewis Hamilton, has [stated that](#) your organization has a consistent and massive problem with human rights and [pledged](#) to work with victims to improve the situation in the country.

With this in mind, we urge you to:

We hope you will consider this letter with the gravity it merits, and we look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely,

Bahrain Death Sentences Follow Torture, Sham Trials

Morocco's Playbook to Crush Dissent

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