

# BAHIRATUN

Issued by the "Bahrain Freedom Movement" for advancing Democracy and Human Rights in Bahrain

A cautious welcome to the deal between the government and the leaders of the uprising

## A step in the right direction

On 16th August 1995, a large group of prisoners were released, prompting suggestions that the government of Bahrain may have realised the futility of its efforts to suppress the aspirations of the people. Several explanations were given to this development, but it later transpired that a deal had been concluded with the leaders of the popular uprising. Five of the prominent leaders of this uprising were among those released. According to this deal, the Al Khalifa government of Bahrain would release the first group, totalling 150 people on 16th August, together with five of the leaders of the uprising. Another 150 people will be freed on 7th September including Mr. Abdul Wahab Hussain, one of the six main sponsors of the popular petition. And on 30th September, Sheikh Abdul Amir Al Jamri will be released with 500-600 prisoners. Meanwhile, the five leaders would calm the situation and request the people to end the uprising. Following the return of normality to the situation, the government and the leaders of the uprising will enter into negotiations with regards to the restoration of the Constitution, the return of the Bahraini exiles, and the release of the prisoners who had been sentenced to various terms of imprisonment.

Apparently, the government intended to take up the offer of the popular leaders after realising that the uprising was continuing with no end in sight. Over the past nine months, the people of Bahrain have been engaged in a anti-government protests which has been suppressed violently by the riot police. At least 14 people were killed either under torture or by police guns as they protested peacefully in the streets of towns and villages. Thousands have been detained, many of them tortured and scores of them sentenced to various prison terms ranging from one year to life sentence as well as one death sentence. International organisations have protested at the killings and the unlawful detentions. An international media campaign has been carried out by the opposition to discredit the regime of the Al Khalifa which has failed to acknowledge the rights of the people to take part in the politics of their country. Most importantly, the government of Bahrain has refused to reinstate the country's constitution which had been suspended by an Amiri decree on 26th August 1995. There have been threats from the people to intensify the pro-democracy campaign as the 20th anniversary of the suspension of the Constitution and the dissolution of the National Assembly approached. It seems that the government wanted to pre-empt the people's efforts on this occasion by the release of some prisoners in a sudden move that had not been anticipated.

How serious is the government about this deal remains unknown. The leaders of the uprising who had been engaged in a painstaking dialogue with the security service in Bahrain, have expressed their willingness to end the uprising and avert a certain political calamity awaiting the country as the Al Khalifa remained committed to the use of violence to answer people's demand for the restoration of the Constitution. However, there is scepticism amongst the people of Bahrain vis-a-vis the deal which has fallen short of achieving the main demand; the reinstatement of the Constitution. There is no timetable for the beginning of the negotiations on the the main issues, no written pledge to respect the rule of constitutional law, no official declaration on the deal, and no inclination to allow the presentation of the people's petition to the Amir, Sheikh Isa bin Salman Al Khalifa. Moreover, since the release of the first group of prisoners, there have been numerous acts of repression. Many people have been arrested, tried or sacked from their jobs. The people have so far, respected the deal and refrained from taking part in protests against the government. They have rallied to the call of their leaders to give the government the chance to negotiate on the main issues leading to the reinstatement of the Constitution.

The government, on its part, acted to prevent a massive show of force by the people of Bahrain on the 20th anniversary of the suspension of the Constitution. There were plans to stage strikes and demonstrations throughout the country. The release of the first group ten days before the anniversary diffused the situation. However, outside the country, the opposition staged a campaign against the Al Khalifa regime accusing it of human rights abuses, anti-constitutional policies and despotism. In London, the opposition organised a demonstration in which hundreds of people took part. It passed through the streets from the Central Mosque at Regent's Park through Edgeware Road until it reached Hyde Park Speakers' Corner. The government of Bahrain flew tens of its agents to London to counter the demonstration, but they failed to leave an impact on the onlookers who sympathised with the demonstrators. On 24th August, a press conference was held at an annexe to the House of Parliament and was chaired by Lord Avebury, the chairman of the parliamentary human rights group. Many journalists attended the meeting which was also attended by agents of the government of Bahrain. A similar press conference was organised in Washington on the same day, where a representative of the Bahrain Freedom Movement was the main host at the function which was

held at the National Press Club. A seminar was organised at the Kufa gallery on 26th August in which representatives of all opposition groups took part. It is clear that whilst any progress on the issues relating to the release of political prisoners is welcome,

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## BFM Policy Statement

Bahrain Freedom Movement (BFM) is concerned with promoting representative political participation and respect of human rights in Bahrain. BFM is a mass movement founded in 1982 bringing together political activists, intellectuals and professionals, amongst others, from diverse sections of Bahrain society. The movement takes its roots from the parliamentary experiment that existed in the period between 1972 and 1975. Following the dissolution of the elected parliament and suspension of key articles of the constitutions by the Amir (ruler) of Bahrain, pro-democracy activists went underground. BFM reflects the aspirations of Bahraini pro-democracy tendency and shares the vision of reviving the rule of constitutional law. The movement is an integral part of the popular and general pro-democracy trend in Bahrain. It strikes a balanced line of thought and action that integrates Islamic values with pluralism.

BFM believes that a Bahrain ruled by constitutional law, as existed in the early seventies, is the most secure route for stability in the country. This in turn can guarantee the interests of the State of Bahrain as well as respecting regional and international frameworks of relationships.

Bahrain can only prosper through the continued diversification of the economy. Growth of business and development of market economy require a stable political environment. This, we believe, can only be achieved through the respect of the will of the people of Bahrain and their rights as specified by the constitution of the country. BFM aims at freeing the people of Bahrain from repression and lack of civil liberties. A key objective is the restoration of the parliament based on the constitution which was enacted in 1973. BFM believes that the constitution represents the national consensus and the will of the citizens of Bahrain. Civil liberties, freedom of speech and assembly and the principles enshrined in the United Nation Universal Declaration on Human Rights as well as Islamic values are regarded as ideals by the BFM.

The Bahrain Freedom Movement believes that attaining its principled goals shall be through peaceful means. BFM adopts civilized ways for settling disputes and conflicts.

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## Momentous events of August 1995 The suppression continues

\* Sheikh Ali Ashor, from Bilad-al-Qadeem was arrested on 31 July. He had been subjected to continuous interrogation by the notorious intelligence officer Adel Flaifel for the past months. He was prevented from delivering sermons in the grand Al-Sadiq Mosque of Manama. Sheikh Ali Ashor led the prayers but did not deliver any speech. However, the security authorities stormed his residence in the early hours of the morning and took him for interrogation and was released a day later.

\* The 31st of July witnessed many clashes between the security forces and residents of Bani Jamra. A new wave of arrests took place in many parts of the country. In Tubli, many houses were stormed and scores of youth disappeared.

\* Clashes between the residents of Sitra (the oil island of Bahrain) have raged for the few days at the beginning of August. The renewal of clashes came after the failure of the ruling family (Al-Khalifa) to show any positive response to the pro-democracy movement that has been demanding the restoration of the parliament and constitution, both of which were suspended in August 1975.

\* Mass arrests took place in Sitra and other areas of Bahrain, such as Abo Saba'a, Duraz and Bani Jamra. The security forces have re-imposed para-military siege on the northern, western rural areas as well as Sitra island.

\* Twenty nine persons were sentenced to 3 and 5 years of imprisonment on 13 July accused of participation in pro-democracy protests. These are some of hundred other people who are being tried before the State Security Court. Under the provisions of the State Security Law, defendants have no right of appeal.

\* On 7 August, at 1.00 am, the security forces stormed the houses of Mr. Abdul Redha Al-Khawajah (27 years old) and Abdul Redha Al-Shuwaikh (25 years old) in Manama. They were detained for one day, tortured severely by Adel Flaifel and released later without knowing why had they been picked up.

\* On 10 August, Seyed Faisal Ali was detained from his house in Sehla during a dawn raid. Three people from Dair were also detained on 12 August during dawn raids. They were Abdul Nabi Al-Hawacheef, Mohammed Ali Al-Ghais and Saeed Al-Ghais. Earlier in the week a 15 years old boy, Jabir Mansoor al-Ghanami was detained for seven days. He had been tortured for unspecified reasons. Other young detainees include Adel Mohammed Isa Madan (15 years old) and Dhia Hasan Al-Sayed (20 years old).

\* The Ministry of Interior issued a memo to other ministries for the confiscation of money entitlement of some of the detainees. Mr. Raed Al-Khawajah (in detention) had been subjected to this new form of punishment and his car was confiscated.

\* On 13 August, Al-Ayyam daily reported that four young people were detained in connection with damages to the house of the artist Rashid Al-Ureifi, widely believed to have been put on blaze by the security forces. The four are Ali Jaafar Abdul Hussain Abdul Mahdi (21 years old), Hussain Ahmad Isa Al-Sayegh (21 years old), Haider Khalil Ibrahim (23 years old)

and Ismail Hasan Salman Jasim (20 years).

\* On 15 August seven teenagers were forced by the security forces to write graffiti on the walls of Duraz while being filmed. The seven were detained sometime ago but the security forces intended to provoke the situation. The seven were exhausted after sessions of severe torture.

\* On 16 August the authorities released several leaders of the opposition. Reuters reported that the Emir of Bahrain, Sheikh Isa bin Sulman al-Khalifa, has "pardoned" 150 people detained in connection with cases of recent disturbances, the Gulf News Agency said. The agency said the interior ministry was taking the necessary steps for their release "to give them the chance to return to the right path." This patronising language was denounced by the Bahrain Freedom Movement and by those released as a sign of the bad intentions of the authorities.

The release was part of a deal struck with jailed opposition leaders (Sheikh Abdul Amir Al-Jamri, Mr. Hassan Mushaima'a, Mr. Abdul Wahab Hussain, Sheikh Khalil Sultan, Sheikh Hasan Sultan) in which it was agreed that the government would release the scores of people together with six leading activists. These are to be followed on 7 September by the release of Mr. Abdul Wahab Hussain together with 150 people. And on 30 September, Sheikh Abdul Amir Al-Jamri would be released together with 500-600 people. In return, the leaders would calm down the situation so that a dialogue is initiated to resolve three main issues: the restoration of the constitution, the return of forcible exiles and the release of those sentenced as a result of the uprising.

A spokesman for the Bahrain Freedom Movement stated that "the Movement respects the decision taken by opposition leaders who have suffered immensely under detention. We also abide by the concluded decisions on the hope that the government would also abide by the agreement". However, the spokesman added that "the history of the ruling Al-Khalifa family and their slide-back on the Constitution in 1975 support our scepticism. We hope that the Amir will agree to receive the pro-democracy petition calling on him to restore the Constitution". The spokesman referred to the sacking of Miss Aziza Hamad Al-Bassam from her senior position in Radio Bahrain stating that "this is yet another proof of the bad intentions of the government". Miss Al-Bassam is one of the sponsors of last April women's petition submitted to the Amir calling on him to restore the Constitution and to put an end to violations of human rights. Recently, Ms Hussa Al-Khumeiri lost her job as director of continuing education with the ministry of education for the same reason. Professor Monira Fakhroo of Bahrain University is awaiting the same fate following repeated threats by the ministry of education because of her sponsoring of pro-democracy demands.

\* On 17 August, the security forces attacked hundreds of people who gathered in Sanabis cemetery for the 40th day commemoration of the martyrdom of Saeed Al-Eskafy, the

16 years old boy who was sexually abused and tortured to death on 8 July by the security forces.

\* On 20 August hundreds of Bahrainis marched through the streets of London yesterday demanding the restoration of the country's constitution, putting an end to human rights violations and allowing forcibly-exiled citizens to return back home. The demonstration, the first of its kind, started from the Central Mosque in Regents Park, through Edgware Road and ended at Marble Arch, near the Hyde Park Speakers' Corner. The demonstrators chanted slogans in both Arabic and English. Thousands of leaflets and books were distributed showing photographs of tortured and killed victims. Many were horrified to know that these things are happening in Bahrain and that British personnel are in charge of the suppression campaign.

\* The opposition marked the twentieth anniversary of the dissolution of the parliament and suspension of key articles of the Constitution by several activities. In addition to the demonstration of 20 August, a news conference was held on Thursday 24 August (11.00 am) at the British House of Parliament (1 Abbey Gardens, Westminster). The press conference was attended by many correspondents of major news media organizations such as Reuters, AFP, Dow Jones, quality newspapers, specialist journals, as well as human rights activists and politicians. On the same day (24 August), Mr. Ala'a Al-Yousuf of the Bahrain Freedom Movement held a press conference in Washington DC at the National Press Club (9.00 am). The BFM delegation met with many human rights organizations, think tanks and politicians concerned with the situation in the Gulf and Bahrain.

\* On 26 August (6.30 pm), the Bahraini Opposition organised a seminar on Bahrain in Kufa Gallery, Bayswater, London. The seminar was addressed by Dr. Abdul Hadi Khalaf (ex-MP of Bahrain Parliament), Mr. Abdul Nabi Al-Ekri (representing the Coordinating Committee for the Popular Front and National Liberation Front in Bahrain), Sheikh Abdul Hamid Al-Radhi (representing the Islamic Front for the Liberation of Bahrain).

\* On 26 August, a group of teenagers from Samahij were taken to a place in their village, forced to write on the walls while being filmed. The security forces were passing provocative messages to the public.

\* The UN Conference on Women started at the end of August with delegates from most countries of the world. A non-governmental conference preceded the official one. Bahrain had two delegations. One of them is comprised of four women, all of whom carry the same surname, that of the ruling family Al-Khalifa. They claimed to represent the women of Bahrain. However, they were encountered by another delegation representing the Bahraini women led by Professor Moneera Fakhroo of Bahrain University. Back at home the government were busy launching their attacks on leading pro-democracy women activists (see page 4 for more details).



## Press conference at the British Parliament Bahrain's Opposition: No solution without constitution

To mark the twentieth anniversary of the suspension of the Constitution in their country, the Bahraini opposition groups held a press conference on 24 August at the House of Commons in Central London. The meeting which was chaired by Lord Avebury, the Chairman of the Parliamentary Human Rights Group, was also addressed by representatives of the four opposition groups in Bahrain, together with a former member of the dissolved National Assembly. It started at 11.00 am and ended at 12.15 British Summer Time.

Lord Avebury started the Press Conference by reminding the audience that it was being held on the 20th anniversary of the suspension of the Constitution and the dissolution of the National Assembly and with this year's uprising. He said a petition signed by 25,000 people calling on the Amir to restore the Constitution has not yet been received by the Amir, Sheikh Isa bin Salman Al Khalifa, but, he said, there are signs that the government may now be willing to talk to the opposition. He cautioned against over-optimism and said: "we have to wait and see whether the government is serious about dialogue". Lord Avebury said that the Parliamentary Human Rights Group is composed of about 100 members of all the main parties in Britain, and its main objective is to press the Foreign Office on issues of human rights in other countries. "Unfortunately", he said, "some ministers have recently acted as a go-between acted as a postman transmitting the views of the Bahraini government without commenting on them". Lord Avebury then introduced the panel. Dr. Abdul Hadi Khalaf, a former mem-

ber of the National Assembly and a lecturer at Lunde University in Sweden, gave a historical background of the parliamentary experiment which started in 1972. He said that as early as 1914, the British administration in Bahrain had deported Bahrainis seeking legislative councils, to India. He thinks the crisis of the Al Khalifa government in Bahrain started in 1972 when they initiated a process of reform leading to the creation of a constitution. "We realised that the Bahraini people were able to work, debate and collectively act to improve their welfare and run their country. That fact was considered a threat by the Al Khalifa ruling family". He further added: "The hawks amongst the Al Khalifa acted swiftly to bring that experiment to an abrupt end in 1975. They sought to silence people using the oil revenues created by the oil boom but that was short-lived".

Mr. Abdul Nabi Al Ekri, speaking on behalf of the Co-ordination Committee of both the Popular Front and the National Liberation Front in Bahrain, referred to the reign of terror unleashed by Ian Henderson in the last thirty years. "Henderson is the real authority" he said. "There is repression, harassment and human rights abuses at a large scale. The situation erupted at the end of last year". He elaborated further by saying that out of an indigenous population of 350,000, up to 10,000 people have been imprisoned over the last twenty years". He said the people of Bahrain are educated and are unlikely to be silenced by the use of terror.

Sheikh Abdul Hamid Al Radhi, representing the Islamic Front for the Liberation of

Bahrain, took the issue of the Constitution and emphasised his movement's demand that the constitution needs to be reformed and modernised, and that the present constitution is outdated.

Finally, Dr. Mansoor Al Jamri, of the Bahrain Freedom Movement, highlighted the recent developments in the country and referred to the deal between the government and the jailed leaders of the uprising. According to the deal, five clerics and 150 detainees were to be released on 16th August, Mr. Abdul Wahab Hussain, one of the six sponsors of the popular petition and another 150 detainees will be released on 7th September, and at the end of September Sheikh Abdul Amir Al Jamri, the main figure in both the uprising and the petition, will be released with 500-600 detainees. It was a step forward, said Dr. Al-Jamri but emphasised that the issue of the restoration of the Constitution must be discussed with the six sponsors of the petition, and that national consensus must be preserved. Although BFM is closely linked to the uprising and its leaders, Dr. Al Jamri said that there was no way the movement would debate the issue of the constitution outside the national consensus.

In his concluding remarks, Lord Avebury referred to the stand of the British Foreign Office, which he said, has been defensive with regards to the situation in Bahrain. Unlike its position vis-à-vis other countries, the FCO has shielded the Al Khalifa of Bahrain in a way that is both shameful and unprincipled, according to Lord Avebury. The press conference was attended by journalists from leading news agencies, TV and Radio stations. The role of Bahraini women was highlighted by the panel and Henderson's role was the talk of the day.

## A strong believer in freedom of speech!

The editor-in-chief of the government owned Al-Ayam newspaper, Mr Nabeel Al-Hamar, withdrew from a live radio interview yesterday citing the participation of Sheikh Ali Salman, one of the leaders of the constitutional movement, as his reason for withdrawing. The interview was an integral part of a highly-regarded radio program presented by Mr Hafez Al-Merazi and broadcast by the Arab American Radio Network marking the twentieth anniversary of the dissolution of the National Assembly and the suspension of several articles of the constitution. Mr Al-Hamar had accepted the invitation to represent the official view on the program and confront any member of the opposition. However soon after the distinguished presenter made his introductory remarks Mr Al-Hamar decided that he could not engage in a debate with any member of opposition in exile. His ignominious withdrawal proved the falsehood of the government's claims that it tolerates debate within the country. The contradiction in the government's position was immediately obvious and the first caller commented that such a dialogue could not take place inside the country if the government jails and deports the leaders of the opposition. The presenter was deeply shocked

when Mr Al-Hamar rudely hung up on him while he was trying to persuade him to remain on the program. The presenter expressed his astonishment at this attitude especially coming from a fellow journalist. He noted that Mr Al-Hamar may not fully appreciate the implications of the restrictions on access to foreign media imposed by the Ministry of Information last April when he initially agreed to be interviewed. This is the second time that a government official or spokesman withdraws from interviews with a member of the opposition also participating. So far, the government and its spokesmen have studiously avoided answering questions on the constitutional and human rights crisis in Bahrain.

In the remainder of the interview Sheikh Ali Salman explained that the main demand in the popular petition of October 1994 was the implementation of the constitution and the restoration of parliamentary life. He indicated that the Consultative Council appointed in 1992 has been totally rejected by the people of Bahrain who insist on their right to elect their own representatives to legislate and hold the government accountable. In response to questions, Sheikh Ali Salman indicated that 14 people have been killed by the security forces

who used live ammunition and torture. He reaffirmed that a key demand is the extension of the right to vote and be elected to women and expressed his sincere hopes that the government would participate in a dialogue with the postulation to find a peaceful solution to his crisis.

### A step in the right direction...

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the efforts to put pressure on the government of Bahrain to force it to accept the people's demand for the restoration of the Constitution will continue. Whilst no attempt is likely to be made for the time being to mount street protests at home, the opposition is in no position to halt its campaign to make the world aware of the extent of anti-constitutionalism in Bahrain. The Al Khalifa family which has ruled Bahrain for more than 200 years have to acknowledge the right of the people of Bahrain to freedom and political participation. No amount of repression can prevent the people from attaining their legitimate rights. Serious dialogue with the opposition is necessary to normalise the situation in Bahrain. Releasing the prisoners is a step forward, but the real progress will have been made when a timetable to reinstate the constitution which has been agreed between the Amir and the people.



## To mark UN Conference

## Pro-democracy women persecuted in Bahrain

Ms Hessa Al-Khumieri, head of the Continuing Education (a department of the Ministry of Education) was sacked on 24 June from her senior position after refusing to remove her name from a petition submitted last April to the Amir of Bahrain. The petition called on the Amir to order a stop to the human rights violations committed by the security forces and to restore the country's constitution. Hessa worked for the Ministry of Education since 1964. She started as a teacher, promoted later to a headmistress of a high school in 1977. In 1980 she worked as head of the library programme and adult education at the Ministry of Education. She is a member of many social and educational organizations and became president of Bahrain Sociological Society for many years throughout the 1980s. The Ministry of Education sent Hessa the following letter dated 24 June 1995:

Ms Hussa Abdulla Al-Khumeiri, head of continuing and adult education. Greetings.

The Ministry has come to be aware that you have violated the rules of civil service No. 471 (1987) relating to disciplinary procedures. You were verbally requested to remove this violation but you refused to do so. Hence we regret to end your services at the Ministry starting from the first of July 1995. The Ministry wishes to express its appreciation of your services in the field of education over the long years. Your efforts were positive and fruitful for the students of Bahrain. We wish you success and good health in your forthcoming life. Signed by the Minister of Education (Ali Fakhroo) on 24 June (one day before his replacement with a military man.

Ms Al-Khumeiri replied to the Minister of Education on 4 July 1995 as follows:

His Excellency the Minister of Education. Greetings. On 2 July 1995 I received the

letter notifying the end of employment as the head of continuing studies (part of the Adult Education Department). In the said letter you stated that I violated the civil service rule No. 471 of 1987. Bearing in mind that during the years of my service stretching back to the school sessions of 1964/65 I had not acted in violation of any ministerial rule. The civil service rule No 471 of 1987 defined the procedures that has to be followed administratively to discipline any person violating employment condition. The rule specifies a gradual disciplinary system starting with a written warning that has a specified period. Hence the decision to end my employment is an arbitrary one and bear no legal justification, especially as the issue in question has nothing to do with my official work at the Ministry. I, therefore, request from your excellency to issue an order suspending the dismissal decision which violates the constitution of the state of Bahrain issued on 6 December 1973 Article 1 Clause F as well as violating Article 23. Signed by Hessa Abdulla Al-Khumeiri.

Ms Aziza Al-Bassam, senior programme editor (writer) at Radio Bahrain was also sacked on 5 August for the same reason. Professor Moniera Fakhroo expects a similar decision after refusing to apologize for petitioning the Amir.

Aziza worked as a teacher and a journalist in the 1980s. She is an active member of different organizations and became the president of the largest women's association in Bahrain (An-Nahda) for many years. In recent years, she worked as programme writer at Radio Bahrain. The Assistant undersecretary for Radio and TV sent the following dismissal letter to Aziza on 5 August 1995.

Miss Aziza Hamad Al-Bassam. Greetings. Re: Notification for Dismissal

As a result of you violating the civil service

rules and since you did not submit an apology letter despite the fact you were given ample time, and in accordance with the directive from higher authorities of the state and in coordination with the Civil Service Bureau, it was decided to dismiss you starting from the above stated date (5 August 1995). Please refer to the Financial and Administrative Affairs Department to receive your entitlements. Signed by Dr. Halla Al-Omran.

Aziza wrote back to the assistant undersecretary on 17 August 1995 as follows:

Dr. Halla Al-Omran, Greetings. Received your letter of 5 August 1995 notifying my dismissal from my position as a senior programme editor in Radio Bahrain. You stated that the reasons behind your decision was my violation of the civil service rules. In this respect please note the following. Firstly: your letter did not specify which clause of the civil service rules that I had violated. You did not mention if these rules specify the writing of an apology letter if someone happen to express his/her views. The latter has been guaranteed by Bahrain's Constitution Article 1 clause f as well as Article 23.

Secondly: The civil service rule No 471 of 1987 specified the procedures by which a managerial decision can be taken to dismiss a person. This starts by writing a warning letter that contains a period for consideration. This procedure was not followed in my case.

Thirdly: The dismissal decision from my work is an arbitrary one without a legal basis. It violates the Constitution of Bahrain which granted me the right to express my views as a citizen. I had not done anything that relates to my employment. My efforts (at Radio Bahrain) have always been valued with satisfaction and esteem from your excellency. For all the above reasons I look to your excellency to issue orders to stop my dismissal from my position. Signed by Aziza Hamad Al-Bassam

## Twenty years of un-constitutionalism

The Uprising in Bahrain that started last December came as a result of an accumulation of injustices in this small island. Bahrain had been controlled by Britain for 150 years until 1971. Political awareness and regional politics has forced the ruling Al-Khalifa family to accept the existence of a constitution and a parliament. In 1973, elections were held for a National Assembly of 30 elected members and 14 ex-officio cabinet minister. The parliamentarians were soon to become three distinct political groups (more or less political parties), the People Bloc, the Religious Bloc and the Centre-Independent Block. The fourth block was the 14 members of the appointed cabinet who were given full rights to participate as members of the parliament.

Between 1973 and late 1974, the government (dominated by members of the ruling family) found it very hard to face up to accountability before the people of Bahrain. One of the issues that needed resolving was the uplifting of the state of emergency imposed on the country in 1957 and subsequently strengthened in 1965, both times after eruption of

popular uprisings. In October 1974, the Amir (ruler) and cabinet by-passed the parliament and constitution by publishing a State Security Law in the official gazette. This raised alarms amongst the public and parliamentarians. The said Law empowered the Interior Minister to order administrative detention of any political suspect for up to three years without charges or trial. All elected members of the parliament stood against the imposition of this unconstitutional law. It is interesting to note that the Constitution of Bahrain states that no bill shall become law unless two authorities approve it: the parliament and the Amir.

Elected members campaigned vigorously against the State Security Law. One of the main opponents was Sheikh Abdul Amir Al-Jamri, who headed a group of parliamentarians which declared in the national press that there is no compromise on this issue.

On 25 August 1975, the government, headed by the brother of the Amir, resigned. The next day, 26th August, the Amir dissolved the parliament and suspended key articles of the constitution which stated that Bahrain may not be

without a parliament for more than 2 months.

In 1992, a group of 300 intellectuals (amongst them Sheikh Abdul Amir Al-Jamri) representing all trends and sections of Bahrain society submitted a petition to the Amir calling on him to restore the parliament and constitution. He rejected their plea and instead appointed a powerless Consultative Council.

In October 1994, another petition calling for the same thing was signed by 25,000 people (a very large number compared to a native population of about 400,000). The response of the ruling Al-Khalifa family was totally unwarranted. Security forces were given orders to shoot to kill innocent civilians and as a result 14 innocent Bahrainis were killed, hundreds injured or crippled, thousands detained and many were forcibly deported. On 1 April, the leading parliamentarian, Sheikh Abdul Amir Al-Jamri was jailed along side the many thousands. On 26th of August this year, Bahrainis marked a sad day, but their will to achieve their rights and freedom is far greater than any time in the past and the government of Bahrain will find it difficult to bypass the people of Bahrain.