

BAHRAIN

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

Sheikh Al Jamri is free, the rest must follow The struggle towards constitutionalism continues

Amnesty International's report on Bahrain which was published last month on the situation of human rights in Bahrain has caused a furore in international sources. It has highlighted one of the bleakest situations in the Middle East with accounts of torture, abuse, extra-judicial killings and unjust trials. It took the international organisation months of preparation and research, and included visits to several countries including Bahrain. The report contained information that has made it the most comprehensive report on human rights abuses in Bahrain to be published. It will be difficult for countries whose government have supported the Al Khalifa of Bahrain over the years to defend that regime without due recriminations. In the words of a western diplomat in Manama, the capital of Bahrain, Al's report is a clear vindication of the terrorist nature of the Al Khalifa government. It was these facts that had prompted the government to rush into the deal with the leaders of the uprising in the hope that the international outcry against the Government of Bahrain would be less noisy.

On 16th August 1995, a group of 150 prisoners were released together with five of the leaders of the uprising. As the details of the agreement became widely known, analysts realised that the government had acted to forestall the outcome of the proceedings of the United Nations Human Rights in Geneva. It was looking into applications by eight international organisations to put Bahrain on the list of countries under UN monitoring system in accordance with procedure 1503. The government of Bahrain adopted enormous pressure on the panel looking into the allegations and bowed to demands calling for the unconditional release of prisoners. It remains to be seen whether these policies of the government could save it from the eventual fury should it persist in its violations of human rights. The subsequent releases were intended to give the impression of the return of normality to the country, a development that was deemed necessary for any international leniency with regards to the monitoring procedure.

The second attempt to deceive international opinion came when the Government of Bahrain released the symbol of the people's movement, Sheikh Abdul Amir Al Jamri. According to the deal concluded in the prison between the leaders of the uprising and the representatives of the government, Sheikh Al Jamri was to be released at the end of September together with a further 600 people. He was, however, released four days earlier. On Monday 25th September, the

day Sheikh Al Jamri was released, Amnesty International's report was distributed to the press. Few days before that Al had informed the Government of Bahrain of its decision to publish its report on Bahrain together with a video film showing the extent of human rights violations in the country. The release of Sheikh Al Jamri on that particular day was intended to confuse the situation. In the process, a fair amount of media coverage was given to both events.

It looks as if the enormous amounts of investment in the public relations exercise on the part of the government may yield some results. Whether such a strategy will always work is disputable. What is a matter of agreement amongst sensible people is that the Al Khalifa of Bahrain are in a quagmire. On one hand. It cannot let loose the internal situation having experienced the extent of enthusiasm amongst the people, and on the other, it hates the words of democracy and parliamentarianism. The people, meanwhile, continue their struggle to achieve their goals with a good amount of determination.

The events of September have demonstrated many aspects of the popular movement. The government has contradicted itself by asserting on one hand that there had been no deal with the leaders of the uprising whilst on the other implementing the tenets of the deal in accordance with the time table detailed by the opposition. That has led many observers to realise the dilemma of a regime that is devoid of any credibility or commitment to the truth. On the other hand, the release of Mr. Abdul Wahab Hussain on 8th September proved to be a rallying point for the opposition and a clear demonstration of people's jubilation and determination. No less than 25,000 people took part in the reception that could only be afforded to public figures of the highest stature. The whole country erupted in a show of joy that annoyed the government beyond belief. The head of state could expect nothing like that, a fact that has undermined the authority of the Al Khalifas and exposed their lack of popularity. Moreover, the release of Sheikh Abdul Amir Al Jamri on 25th September was even a bigger show of people's power in the face of an arrogant regime. The notorious Ian Henderson had to concede defeat as he saw for himself the magnitude of the reception of the people's heroes, at a time when none of the officials of the government could venture out in the streets.

One of the most important features of the whole episode is the preservation of the nation-

al unity after months of hammering by the agents of the regime on this issue in their attempt to create dissension amongst the people. Today, Bahraini society exhibits a solid front in the fact of the Al Khalifa's refusal to acknowledge the existence of the people. It may be that the government's intention is to limit the people's demands to the release of the prisoners, and that by setting them free, it would absolve itself of the duty to respond to the other demands. The reality is that it will be impossible for the situation in the country to return to its normality without the full implementation of the Constitution. This was and still is the main demand of the people; right, left and centre. The national consensus that had been expressed by the 25,000 signatures on the petition calling on the Amir to reinstate the Constitution is still there, and the new initiative by the leaders of the uprising will be to press for a dialogue with the Amir to discuss that specific demand.

The people of the world have witnessed the massive turnout by the people of Bahrain to receive their beloved detainees, who had been held hostages by the government. The massive presence is tantamount to a popular referendum in support of the constitutional rule. It will be a grave mistake to believe the claims often made by the regime that the constitutional demands are inspired by foreigners. The movement is a genuine expression of the popular desire to uphold the rule of law under the Constitution. The wide spectrum of opinion in the country, and the popular alliance that has been formed in Bahrain leaves no room for compromise on the essential demand; the reinstatement of the Constitution.

It is therefore only fair to suggest that the situation in Bahrain remains volatile. The government is the only power which is in a position to diffuse it. The release of the prisoners is only the beginning. Their continued detention could not serve the purposes of the government. Their release is therefore not a concession. The government has been keen to arrange a visit to the Amir by the released leaders, but the general consensus is that he should apologise to the people of Bahrain for the suffering they have endured over the last two decades as a result of his decree suspending the Constitution and dissolving the National Assembly. In modern times, despotic monarchies have either to give way to constitutionalism or face being swept away by the tide of change. The people of Bahrain have sacrificed enough and deserve to live under a constitutional rule. They will not abandon their struggle until this is achieved.

Opposition strategy remains the same Constitutional parliament to end despotism

The strategy of the Bahraini opposition is undergoing a critical review in view of the reconciliation talks that started to take effect in mid August. This is the first time in the history of Bahrain that the government yields to public opinion and accepts the fact of life that opposition is an integral part of today's politics. The government of Bahrain has not yet confirmed the existence of dialogue, a point of disagreement with the opposition. In a recent round of talks, the government side stated that what is happening is a new phenomenon and the political system has yet to adapt.

On 15 September, the London-based Saudi paper Al-Hayat quoted "diplomatic and political sources in Bahrain" and referred to the importance of the "current dialogue amongst most of the Bahraini sections of society". This is probably the first time the government attempts to adapt to modern politics. The paper also referred to statements made by the prime minister regarding plans for "increasing the scope of the consultative assembly .. and establishing local councils". These statements are aimed at pre-empting the next phase of dialogue.

As agreed between the government and opposition leaders, that after the end of the first phase of talks, political dialogue will then take place with the Amir. The first phase lasts until the end of September and should see the end of street clashes in return for releasing a thousand detainees. Later on, the sentenced political prisoners numbering about 200 people should be freed and those forcibly exiled numbering about a thousand people should be allowed back home.

However, the government continues to violate human rights. For example, a score of youth who have lived in Bahrain since their birth while retaining their Saudi passports have been deported to Saudi Arabia after their release. A teenager by the name Khalil Ibrahim Al-Hanoon, who was borne in Bahrain and has since lived

with his Saudi father and Bahraini mother in Karzakkan (west of Bahrain), has been deported and his family has not been able to know his fate.

Political dialogue has always been the aim of the Bahraini opposition. The 1994 petition was sponsored by leading personalities representing virtually all sections and tendencies in Bahrain's society. Furthermore, the petition was circulated amongst the public and some 25,000 people signed their names calling on the Amir to restore the country's constitution and parliament, both were suspended in 1975 by the Amir himself. The national consensus manifested by the petition is one of the greatest achievements of the Bahraini opposition. The strength of the internal public opinion has forced the government to re-think its approach regarding popular participation in the day-to-day running of the country.

That's why the recently freed opposition leaders have taken the brave step of directly involving the public in the formulation of policies and positions. Details of reconciliation talks are publicly transmitted via public seminars with critical analyses and questioning taking place between the opposition leaders and members of the public. This is being the healthiest approach and the surest way to achieve the aims of the people of Bahrain. These aims remain as stated in the historic petition that called for the restoration of constitutional politics and an end to arbitrary and absolute practices.

National Movement:

The Coordinating Committee of National Liberation Front (Bahrain) and Popular Front in Bahrain issued a statement on 11 September clarifying their movements' position towards the reconciliation talks in Bahrain.

"The government (of Bahrain) released Mr.

Abdul Wahab Hussain on 8 September. He was supposed to have been released on 7 September together with 150 prisoners, in accordance with the agreement publicized by the Bahrain Freedom Movement. The agreement requires the matching of these releases with the BFM calming down the situation.

The Coordinating Committee of the National Liberation Front and the Popular Front of Bahrain values the importance of releasing all citizens (those sentenced as well as those un-sentenced) and hence that this would provide an opportunity for rationalising the political and social issues for the interest of the people and the home-land. The irrational attitude of the government ignited the uprising of the last months and has caused the martyrdom of 14 citizens as well as deportation of tens of people and the jailing of many thousands.

The Coordinating Committee congratulates the struggling brothers who have been released and affirms the necessity of the government abiding by its promises to release all political detainees, returning those dismissed to their employment, allowing forcible-exile to return home and conducting investigation into the killing of citizens during demonstrations and under torture. We hope that the security phase is closed all together and that a new quantum-leap is established for political dialogue. The latter can be achieved through the initiation of dialogue between the Amir and the committee of distinguished people who sponsored the popular petition calling on the Amir to restore the parliament and constitution of the country.

We believe that it is in the interest of our people and home-land as well as the rest of the GCC countries that the government adopts the language of dialogue with the people and political forces for solving all sorts of problems. This is better than resorting to terrorising, detaining and killing the people".

Inequality before the law

Members of the royal family exploit their positions while engaging in business. Doing or starting a business is a task that is admirable in itself and should be commended in all respects. However, when it comes to exploitation, it is a different story. In the case of Bahrain, many and increasingly more members of the ruling family have something to do with business.

True, some of the businesses are helpful to the economy, such as building a hotel or starting a restaurant targeting the visitors and the like. Yet, doing business at the expense of many others, legal or otherwise, moral or not, is something not acceptable and rather deplorable.

According to an article in the Los Angeles Times in late June 1995, Al Khalifa are engaged in all sorts of profitable businesses in Bahrain. No sooner an entrepreneur starts a new promising business than a member of Al Khalifa becoming a rival. The ruling family "business-man" receives special treatment when deciding to have a business. The same does not hold true of the others, especially those who come from

deprived families or have no special connection to the ruling family. To be specific, all members of Al Khalifa are exempted from paying fees for governmental services. The "royals" pay no utility charges and can import any goods but pay no customs.

Today, the prime minister himself, has built an empire of businesses from hotels to travel agencies to even bakery. The same holds of his brother Mohammed who owns fisheries and farms. Worse yet, others could not easily compete with Al Khalifa, with few exceptions. For example, the hotel industry is basically controlled by members of the ruling family.

Thus, the Sheraton is owned by the ruler's sons. Regency is owned by the prime minister. The newly built Le Royal Meridian is mostly owned by the premier and his son, Mohammed, the flamboyant brother of the ruler and prime minister owns a total of seven hotels.

True, some of the hotels are not owned by members of the ruling family, such as the Gulf Hotel and Hilton. Also, most businesses oper-

ating in the diplomatic area are owned by Al Khalifa, one way or another. This is true of the restaurants, where locals are basically denied to run outlets in the resourceful financial district. Moreover, the travel agency industry is somehow competitive, but more and more Al Khalifa members have entered the enterprise in the recent past. Now, most of the government travel businesses are given to Al Khalifa owned agencies, which come under different names, with no obvious connections to the ruling family. Many merchants privately complain that the Al Khalifa do not play by fair rules as they can overstep the boundaries of the business rules.

The government must change improper business practices and start treating citizens in a fair manner and ensures that all are equal before the law. It is in the interest of all that the rule of constitutional law is established. The rule of law is the pillar for social justice, stable government and healthy state of relationships amongst all sections of society.

While the authorities dither

The leaders of the Opposition consolidate their approach

* 7 September: More than 12 thousand people poured into the streets of Nuweidrat, the home village of the leading pro-democracy leader Mr. Abdul Wahab Hussain, who was detained last March, in anticipation of his release today together with 150 people as part of a deal with the jailed leaders of the opposition. People from all over the country gathered peacefully, but the vast number of them caused a huge traffic jam and people had to walk miles for the reception part. The authorities hesitated in its compliance with the agreement and released false news stating that no deal was struck with the leaders of the opposition in an attempt to divert attention.

At 2.15 pm, several leaders who had been released on 16 August as part of the deal were called for a lengthy meeting at the Ministry of the Interior. During the meeting the security authorities expressed their unease at the mass gatherings and reception part for Mr. Abdul Wahab Hussain. At the end of the meeting the authorities stated that they will release Mr. Hussain tomorrow, Friday 8 September, at a no specified time and that the 150 people will be released in batches starting Saturday 9 September.

Two of the leaders went back to the gatherings at 9.00 pm (seven hours later) and informed about the outcome of the lengthy meeting. The crowds replied with slogans warning the government of the grave consequences if they slide back and refuse to release Mr. Abdul Wahab Hussain as scheduled.

* 8 September: Despite the denial of the Bahraini Information Minister that there exists an agreement between the jailed opposition leaders and the government, Mr. Abdul Wahab Hussain has been released today just before 7.00 pm (Bahrain local time). The release is part of the agreement to free 150 people together with Mr. Hussain on 7 September. Crowds started gathering in a much larger number reaching 20 thousands people. The security authorities delayed the release until the evening at around 7.00 pm. However, at around 6.00 pm the security forces attacked parts of the crowds by tear gas and rubber bullets. It later transpired that this attack was a revenge one against the people who defied all government's threats and proved that the will of the people is stronger than the suppression of the oppressors.

As part of the agreement, around 600 people are scheduled to be released on 30 September together with the leading opposition leader Sheikh Abdul Amir Al-Jamri.

* 12 September: Resumption of reconciliation talks. In a meeting yesterday attended by opposition leaders (including the jailed Sheikh Abdul Amir Al-Jamri) and representatives of the government, it was agreed to resume the reconciliation talks and proceed forward with the release of detainees as scheduled. As a result some fifty people were released today to be followed by a hundred more prisoners in the following days. This is in line with the deal that had been agreed previously. Sheikh Abdul Amir Al-Jamri and about 600 people would still be released by the end of

September. Amongst the agreed points was the acceptance by both parties that the aim of this initial stage would be to establish stability and security. Thence forward, political dialogue will take place with the Amir, Sheikh Isa bin Salman Al-Khalifa, with the ultimate aim of restoring the constitution within the framework of national consensus.

On the other hand the spokesperson for the Bahrain Freedom Movement said that the statements made by the prime minister to the national press on 11 September in which he accused the opposition as being foreign-inspired are not conducive to the spirit of national reconciliation. He added that the political struggle to attain democracy through the reinstatement of the National assembly would continue utilizing all possible peaceful means.

* Inside Bahrain, the freed leaders of the opposition were conducting one of the greatest mass political dialogue in the country involving the public and all tendencies in the country. On 10 September, two seminars were organised. The first was in Nuweidrat, the home village of Mr. Abdul Wahab Hussain. The seminar was attended by thousands of people and amongst those addressing the gathering was an Ex-MP, Mr. Mohammed Jaber Sabah, speaking for the nationalist movement. Mr. Sabah declared the whole-hearted and united support of the active internal opposition groups for the reconciliation talks and pledged to continue raising the banner of constitutionalism in Bahrain. The second seminar was held at Karbabad with more than 3000 people gathering to listen to recently freed leaders. Mr. Hasan Mushaima re-asserted the demands of the opposition that political dialogue must be made in the open with an agreed timetable. Only by doing so that the achieved stability of the country may last longer.

* On 19 September, a seminar was addressed by Abdul Wahab Hussain in Duraz. More than 10 thousands people gathered to listen to and debate the various issues surrounding the "informal" agreement between the government and opposition. One of the cases discussed was pro-democracy young activist who remained in jail. The authorities were refusing to release the 17 years old girl detained last May on charges of participating in pro-democracy protests. Ms. Hayat Al-Qamar, from Duraz village, is believed to be in solitary confinement since her arrest several months ago. A recently released detainee stated that the name Hayat was heard in the corridors of the torture chambers. The authorities had earlier promised to release Hayat but declined to do so for unknown reasons. This in itself has raised doubts as to the reasons behind keeping her and whether there is anything the authorities are attempting to hide.

* The London Arabic daily, Al-Quds Al-Arabi, published an article on 19 September, written by Professor Monira Fakhroo of Bahrain University. Professor Fakhroo is one of the leading personalities who sponsored the pro-democracy petition as well as the women's petition that was submitted five months

ago to the Amir. As a result of the latter two leading women were dismissed from their senior position. The two are Ms. Hessa Al-Khumeiri and Ms. Aziza Al-Bassam. Professor Fakhroo is also under threat of dismissal. Professor Fakhroo stated that "it is obvious that the attitude of the government is not to yield to the pressures of the petitions which demand the return to parliamentary life. Further, it gives no indication of its willingness to even negotiate on the issue. On the contrary, its responses were suppression of disturbances with brutal force, dispersal of demonstrations, detentions, control of key points around trouble areas, the presence of police controls with the school grounds and university campuses, and the refusal to receive delegates and their petitions. It is noteworthy that the authorities acted in the same old fashioned way as it did during the previous uprisings by not acknowledging the existence of any opposition".

Professor Monira Fakhroo has just returned from Beijing where she represented the non-governmental women's organizations of Bahrain. She encountered four ladies from the ruling family who claimed to represent all Bahraini women despite the fact that they were part of the official delegation.

* On 20 September, the opposition organized a press conference in Paris (Hotel Lutetia) this morning attended by media and human rights organizations. Mr. Abdul Nabi Al-Ekri outlined how the Bahraini government is resisting the pro-democracy trend in the country and the determination of the opposition to achieve its legitimate aims by depending on the constitution and national consensus. The popular support for the submission of the 1994 historic petition signed by 25,000 people was evident throughout the episodes of struggle. "The government is attempting to deflect internal and external opinions from the core issue: that of restoring the parliament and constitution", Mr. Al-Ekri said.

On the recent agreement between five jailed leaders and the government, Mr. Al-Ekri stated that the opposition is astonished at the behaviour of the Bahraini officials who refuse to admit the fact that a dialogue was initiated. "If anything, it shows the nature of absolute rule that refuses to recognize the existence of a second opinion". At the end of the conference Mr. Al-Ekri was interviewed by the BBC, Radio Paris International and Monte Carlo. Abdul Nabi Al-Ekri is a member of the coordinating committee for the Popular Front and the National Front of Bahrain.

* The militarization of the Education sector was strengthened further on 20 September by the appointment of an unknown military man, Mohammed Al-Ghatam as rector of Bahrain University. Al-Ghatam was brought from the Ministry of Defence to head the University of Bahrain ahead of the new session (starting this month) to make sure that the iron fist policy is firmly implemented against the university students who staged massive pro-democracy marches in the past months. The university campuses are encircled by military units, something resisted by all university staff and students. The militarization of the university came after the appointment of another unknown military man, Mr. Abdul Aziz Al-Fadhel as Minister of Education last June.

Amnesty International Bahrain: A Human Rights Crisis

A damning 50 page report accompanied by a filmed news-release were published by Amnesty International on 26 September. The report is a result of a major investigation undertaken by AI staff who interviewed numerous number of people affected by the abuses of the security forces in the past months. The report's summary stated:

"The human rights situation in Bahrain has deteriorated seriously since December 1994 following widespread demonstrations and protests calling on the government to restore democratic rights - namely, to allow the National Assembly (dissolved since 1975) to reconvene to respect the country's Constitution. Over the past ten months several thousands people were arrested, including women and children, many of whom continue to be held incommunicado without charge or trial. At least 150 detainees have been tried and convicted following proceedings which fell far short of international standards for fair trial. The torture and ill-treatment of detainees has been widespread and systematic, with two deaths in custody reported to date. Security forces and riot police repeatedly used live ammunition to quell protesters, resulting in the killing of ten civilians in circumstances suggesting that they have been extrajudicially executed. At least 20 Bahraini nationals suggesting that they may have been extrajudicially executed. At least 20 Bahraini nationals were forcibly exiled from the country or were denied entry after attempting to return.

Throughout, the Government of Bahrain has denied that forces under its authority have committed these widespread violations of hu-

man rights. It has sought to maintain - both at home and abroad - that it has acted within the law with regard to arrest and detention procedures, that the rights of detainees in custody were respected, and that those convicted received the benefit of fair trials. Furthermore, the government has sought to justify its strong-arm tactics in quelling demonstrators by pointing to acts of violence which it accused "extremist" elements of having perpetrated. It has stated publicly that such acts of violence were carried out at the instigation of hostile foreign powers.

At the same time, the government has failed to release information on the names and whereabouts of those arrested, and has denied the vast majority of them access to their relatives and defence lawyers. Many of those convicted received grossly unfair trials held in camera before the State Security Court. To the best of Amnesty International's knowledge, the government has failed to set up investigations into any allegations of torture or into incidents involving the killing of demonstrators. No one has been brought to justice for these crimes. The government has failed to respond to Amnesty International's numerous appeals on behalf of victims of human rights violations, and continues to deny the organization access to the country to investigate allegations it has received or to observe ongoing trials. In this report, Amnesty International makes a set of 13 recommendations to the Government of Bahrain. If implemented, these measures could help improve the human rights situation in the country and would demonstrate a genuine commitment to the promotion of international human rights standards and their effective implementation.

Bert Mapp expelled from British-Bahrain Society What is the society's raison d'être?

Bert Mapp, one of the best friends of Bahrain, was expelled from the Bahrain Society (which is controlled by Bahrain Embassy) on 18 September following a meeting of the executive committee. Bert Mapp edited a newsletter, *The Islander*, during his employment in Bahrain in the fifties. He also wrote a book on Bahrain (ISBN 0-9521814-0-1) last year. He could have earned a lot of money (like some others) by glorifying a dictatorship. Instead, he carried the banner of freedom of expression and did his best to defend the rights of the people of Bahrain. As a result, the Bahrain Society expelled him without any hesitation. Bert wrote to the Society saying:

"Dear Mr Martin: Thank you for your letter of 8 August 1995 concerning moves to expel me from the Bahrain Society. I am obliged for the invitation to put forward "a defence." (Would that this practice were universal!) I observe your repeated use of the term "embarrassment." While this may be a euphemism, I suggest that as grown up chaps we have no need to be sensitive about any of the issues arising here. A question that has perplexed me, namely, What is the society's raison d'être? It is clearly a social, drinking club and for some a means of furthering selfish interests. The 'non-political' qualification would be less questionable if the society gave

up the habit of entertaining British Defence ministers. Promoting friendship and a closer understanding between Bahrainis and the British I have regarded as a sound principle ever since I went to work for Bapco in 1951, and in writing and speaking about Bahrain I have tried to follow it. One of the problems, of course, is identifying precisely who we mean when referring to "Bahrainis" and "the British."

Let us consider one particular Bahraini, the Ambassador. You accuse me of offending him on more than one occasion. Once he told me of his anger about passages in my book - months after he had been singing the praises of my work. Was he offended by my visiting his embassy last month (when he refused to see me)? I then handed in a petition to the Amir, signed by leading women members of the House of Lords, who backed Bahraini women petitioners who were seeking democracy and appealed for clemency for those Bahraini signatories.

My involvement does not end there. A motion initiated by me is down for debate at Labour's annual conference in October, in these terms: "This conference, committed to parliamentary democracy, urges the Labour Party and the next Labour Government to assist, by non-violent means, movements struggling for democracy and human rights in Bahrain and other feudal states."

Hawar Island: Bahrain's position is undermined by its government

Qatar's emir, in an interview published on 2 September, criticised Bahrain's decision to build a tourist resort on a Gulf island claimed by both countries. "That constitutes a violation of the principles within the frame of the solution to which the two parties have agreed and which does not permit the undertaking of such works," Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani, told Qatar's *al-Watan* newspaper.

The Bahraini government housed several hundreds of people who were brought to the country in the past months and given Bahraini citizenships in return for working for the Ministry of the Interior's anti-riot squad.

The government has also constructed tourist facilities on Hawar island just off the Qatari coast, one of a cluster of potentially oil-rich islands and reefs. The row between Bahrain and Qatar came to a head in the 1980s when Qatar used force to prevent Bahrain from building a military post on Fasht-ad-Dibal, another disputed island. The Qatari emir, who replaced his father in a bloodless palace coup in June, called on "the brothers in Bahrain" to cooperate with Doha and the International Court of Justice in The Hague to settle the sovereignty dispute.

Bahrain has refused to accept the jurisdiction of the court which decided in January that it had jurisdiction and is expected to produce a verdict by the end of next year. Although Qatar has welcomed mediation by its larger neighbour Saudi Arabia, it refuses to drop its case at the International Court of Justice.

On 4 September the Bahraini Foreign Ministry defended the construction work stating that Hawar was sovereign territory. The Foreign Ministry sent a memorandum to Qatar reiterating that Hawar islands are, and have always been, the sovereign territory of the state of Bahrain. "Bahrain is merely exercising its legitimate rights as sovereign, without intending in any way to affect the brotherly relations which exist between itself and the state of Qatar," the Bahraini statement added.

On 9 September, Qatar's Emir Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani said that Qatar will drop its case at the International Court of Justice if Saudi Arabian mediation succeeds in ending its territorial dispute with Bahrain. "If this mediation succeeds, we will withdraw the case at the International Court of Justice, but if the mediation does not succeed, then we will accept the ruling of the International Court of Justice," he said. "For Saudi Arabia to succeed in the mediation, both parties should be ready to accept the (Saudi) solution," he added. Sheikh Hamad was speaking in an interview with the Saudi London-based MBC television.

It is worth noting that the people of Bahrain are prevented from seeing more than half of Bahrain islands. For example, the south of Bahrain (comprising some 40% of total area) is an exclusive land for the ruling family.

Similarly, the important islands of Uman-Naasan, Jedda and Um-Subban have been allocated as private estates for the Amir, the Prime Minister and their younger brother Mohammed. Bahrain's position is weak as the people have no say in any national issue and will continue to be weaker if the government continues to ignore public interest.