

# BAHRAIN

Issued by the "Bahrain Freedom Movement" for Promoting Human and Constitutional Rights

Human rights organisations deplore violations in Bahrain

## No compromise on constitutional demands

Despite the recent escalation by the Government of Bahrain of its attacks on the people, the constitutional uprising is bound to continue unabated. The incredible response by the people to the call by the opposition to observe a week of mourning to commemorate the death of Isa Qambar and press for the constitutional demands has convinced observers and governments of the inevitability of the reinstatement of the country's constitution if a more serious instability not only in Bahrain but in the whole Gulf is to be averted. Starting on the Eid Al Adha, (Feast of Sacrifice), the people observed a week of frantic peaceful activities to press their demands and express their total rejection of the policies of the government which are taking a sharp turn to the worse on the level of human rights and democracy. As collective punishment became more intense, the resolve of the people became stronger, and there is now a consensus that should they fail this time to achieve the constitutional goals, a regime not too dissimilar to that of Saddam Hussain of Iraq will emerge in Bahrain, a prospect that is both possible and terrible.

After the international pressure on the government with regards to Mr. Ahmad Al-Shamlan, it bowed down and put the famous lawyer on a show trial. The notorious State Security Court decided to release the human rights activist until 5th May when he will be sentenced. He remained under house arrest until then. Whatever that sentence may be, it became clear that the man was being held unlawfully and that the charges against him were unfounded, as were the accusations against the leaders of the popular uprising. Whether he is acquitted or sentenced to a term of imprisonment remains to be seen but the damage to the policies of the government has already been done. Since 7th February, when Mr. Shamlan was arrested, the world has come to know in undisturbed way the broad base of the opposition, and the attempts by the regime to smear its image by attaching to it sectarianism and factionalism have disastorously failed. Furthermore, the views of the liberals were expressed by one of its leading figures, Mohammad Jaber Sabah, in an article published in the London-based daily Al Quds (27 April), in which he reiterated the demands of the people without any compromise. He said that peace and tranquillity would come to the country only when the constitution was reinstated, the political prisoners released and the exiles allowed back. These unfolding views are no cause for comfort to the government which thought that the massive crackdown on the constitutional uprising would curtail expression of support for its demands.

Instead of acquiescing to the legitimate demands, the Al Khalifa tribal regime resorted to more repressive policies, and sought to curtail further the freedom of expression. Last month the Amir issued a decree to form the so-called Supreme Council of Islamic Affairs, whose main function is to prevent free speech in mosques and other religious seminaries. So far the Shiite of Bahrain have been allowed to choose their own clerics to lead prayers at mosques and deliver speeches at other religious institutions. The new decree attempts to take away that symbolic freedom in the same way as Saddam Hussain did in Iraq. Since the suspension of the constitution and dissolution of the National Assembly in 1975, the Al Khalifa have been tightening the grip on the social, religious and political affairs of the country. All youth club are under their control and are run by a Higher Youth and Sports Council, headed by the Crown Prince. They appointed the Consultative Council which has no power and is no more than a rubber stamp to the governmental decisions. The proposed Islamic Council will be headed by Sheikh Abdulla bin Khalid Al Khalifa, the Minister of Justice. This is further evidence of the repressive policies of the Al Khalifa who could not live in this day and age and are bound by their reactionary past. The people of Bahrain have no alternative but to

oppose these unconstitutional measures, and are determined to use all peaceful means of protest to ensure such policies are unsuccessful.

It is our belief that the more the Al Khalifa continue their repressive policies, the nearer they are to collapse. The people of Bahrain, who are enlightened, educated and dedicated to political reform and openness, will not abandon their struggle to attain their rights whatever the Al Khalifa do. They are being supported in their just struggle by a spectrum of international organisations and bodies, and the support offered by such organisations last month in Geneva, was unequivocal. Under the auspices of the United Nations Human Rights Commissions, representatives of human rights groups from Africa, America, Europe and Asia championed the cause of human rights in Bahrain and called for an immediate end to arbitrary detentions, unlawful killings, forcible exile, abuse of the rights of children, and the release of all women detainees. Our people are confident that their democratic demands could not be defeated, and that those opposed to the constitution and elections are bound to fail. For countries with interests in the Gulf, the stakes in the crisis of Bahrain are high and they must not let the forces of backwardness and dictatorship prevail.

## Institutionalizing martial law will not deter the people

In 1992 a group of 300 professionals and distinguished people coming from all walks of life and representing all sections of Bahrain society combined their efforts and submitted a petition calling for the restoration of the dissolved parliament. The ruling Al-Khalifa family was stunned since its rule depended on the divisive policies of segregating the Bahraini society and colliding one against the other. The next blow was in 1994 when the broadly based opposition launched a campaign to collect signatures from the public reinforcing the call for a return to constitutional law. The ruling family lost its nerves and started arresting and dismissing those personalities leading the campaign. In response to these measures, mass demonstrations took to the streets calling for the release of those arrested. However, instead of rationally tackling the crisis, the ruling family unleashed crackdown campaigns killing many people and arresting thousands. Between April and September 1995, reconciliation talks were conducted with jailed leaders. When the jailed leaders, spearheaded by Sheikh Abdul Amir Al-Jamri, were released, calm was established within days. This created a jealousy amongst

the ruling family. The friction between the various wings resulted in sacrificing the stability of Bahrain for a showdown with the opposition.

From the beginning, the ruling family adopted a strategy to stamp the opposition of belonging to a certain sect (Shia). By doing so, the ruling family thought of enticing the West by implying an Iranian involvement (something which the government failed to prove and convince any independent observer). From there, the strategy aimed at creating some violence to accuse the opposition of extremism. All these could not provide a victory for the ruling family. Next, came the ideas of institutionalizing the unofficial m

The creation of the Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs is aimed at removing the religious rights of the Shia community which it enjoyed for 1400 years. By doing so the rulers hope to create an internal conflict and divert attention from the core issue. The core issue is that the ruling family is governing Bahrain without any constitutional basis and without legitimacy in violation of the post-independence constitution.

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# April 1996: Kangaroo courts conclude trials in minutes...

1 April: The residents of Bani Jamra staged mass demonstrations to commemorate the 1st of April which last year witnessed the house arrest of Sheikh Al-Jamri, the amputation of the leg of Sadiq Al-Arab and the martyrdom of Mohammed Yousif Atteya and Mohammed Ali Abdul Razzaqa. The relatives of the martyrs were summoned by the intelligence department and threatened of arrest if the commemorations continued. In Duraz, residents went out in demonstration after the end of Bani Jamra processions. Riot police continued their attacks against both villages. Several people were arrested on the spot. Clashes were also reported in Sanabis.

Some of the girl students who were arrested on 26 and 27 March following schools protests spoke of the way they had been tortured. They were stripped naked and intimidated by women police.

The unconstitutional State Security Court sentenced two young persons. Eskander Ahmed Sulman, 22, was sentenced to a seven year jail term and Hussain Ali Ahmed al-Satarwa, 19, to five years. Both were also ordered to pay 16,000 dinars (more than \$40,000).

2 April: Clashes resurfaced in several areas of Bahrain. Karzakkan was attacked on 2 April and schools continued to suffer from high absenteeism as well as protests by students. The interior ministry announced the names of two people arrested in Zinj last week and accused them of arson. Zuhair Hassan Ibrahim, 25, and Sadiq Ali Hassan, 19, were haphazardly picked up from Zinj and accused of causing the fire at Al-Zayani car show. These announcements have had negative effects, and insurance companies have met to re-define their policy and practice in Bahrain. The Bahraini security forces dragged the situation to violence and continue to defy all calls for calming down the situation. The opposition demands a return to constitutional politics.

4 April: The following were arrested in Dubai: Shakir Al-Fardan, Mohammed Sanad, Ahmad Al-Mahozhi, Mahdi Abbas as well as several others. A Bahrain cleric, Sheikh Ibrahim Al-Ansari was arrested in Kuwait and no news was heard about him. Sayed Abdulla Al-Ghoreifi was prevented from entering Saudi Arabia. The Saudi authorities returned him to Syria.

5 April: In Ghorfeifa and Jufair, more than fifty people have been detained in the past few days in the worst crackdown on these two districts of Manama. The residents of the principal uprising island of Sitra went out on the streets at 1.00pm and clashed with the security forces.

6 April: one of the security courts recently created by virtue of two unconstitutional decrees (issued on 20 March), sentenced six Bahrainis to jail for three to five years and imposed arbitrary fines of 16,000 dinars (\$42,000) each. Fadhil Ali Abdulhussain Thabit, 30, and Abdulnabi Abdulaziz Al-Adraj, 23, were sentenced to five years. Abdul-Redha Abdulhussain Isa, 23, Mohammed Salman Ahmed Thabit, 18, Fadhil Abdulrasool Radhi Ma'atooq, 20, and Tayseer Mohammed Mohsin Al-Elewait, 19, were sentenced to 3 years.

Lawyers were prevented from defending the six persons properly. Two young persons Ali Yousif Hassan and Mohammed Jaffer Mansoor were sentenced to three years imprisonment. One person had his car confiscated by a kangaroo-court order.

7 April: It has been reported that an explosion wrecked a complex belonging to the Sheraton Hotel in the heart of the capital Manama, at 2.00 am (7 April). The explosion damaged three shops but caused no injuries. The cycle of violence is being fostered by the repressive government's crackdown on residential areas and mass jailing and sentencing of young and innocent people. The opposition has called on the government to restore constitutional law to the country and has called for putting an end to violence from all sources.

7 April: In Abo-Dhabi, Mr. Yaqub Yousif Al-Sori was detained because security men could not find his brother Jamil when raiding their house on 28 March. The family was told that the Bahraini authorities ordered the arrest of Jamil, but no explanation was given for taking another brother as a hostage. Later on, Yaqub was handed over to the Bahrain authorities. Many young persons in detention are given the choice of staying in jail or leaving Bahrain. Some have chosen to exit detention by accepting to leave Bahrain to neighboring Gulf countries. Several Gulf countries started arresting Bahrainis for no reason.

8 April: The unconstitutional State Security Court sentenced two teenage girls to six months and one year prison sentences. Safeya Yonis Ali Darwish, 16 years old from Karzakkan village and studies at Hamad Town Secondary School was sentenced to six months prison term, while Nawal Ali Ebadi, 16, also from Karzakkan but studies at Sar Secondary School was sentenced to one year prison term. They were detained after eruption of students' protests following the unlawful execution of Isa Qambar on 26 March. Scores of girls were arrested and tortured. (Both girls were later released and their parents paid 300 dinars).

Security forces have re-started ransacking mosques in the past few days. In Bani Jamra alone, three mosques were attacked and turned upside down by security forces. Similar attack took place in Jed-Ali, Tobli, and other places. Persons in-charge of mosques have been summoned and threatened of arrest in a desperate attempt to empty mosques from attendants.

9 April: The following girls were arrested: Ahlam Abdulaziz Salman Al-Hindi, 16 (from Tobli) and Zainab Abdulhussain Khatem, 17 (from Karzakkan). Schools in Jedhafs witnessed clashes between teenage students and security forces.

10 April: The interior ministry announced it arrested three people and accused them of causing the fire in the Sheraton trade complex on 7 April. The three are known to be Zuhair Jawad Al-Alqam, 27, Yasir Omran, 20 and Jalal, 19. All three come from Manama. Security forces attacked Sanabis and arrested scores of people.

11 April: Hundreds of women staged a protest in Sanabis Cemetery and raised slogans denouncing the security forces' indecent as-

saults on women. The women also declared that there is no turning back on the original demand of restoring the elected parliament.

12 April, the grand mosque at Qafool (Manama) was besieged by security forces and six people were arrested to prevent normal gathering for prayers.

14 April: Reuters reported that "Bahrain on Sunday jailed 15 Shi'ite Moslems, including a blind cleric, held in connection with anti-government protests, lawyers said. They said the State Security Court jailed Hussain al-Mahoozi and Mohammad Isa Haram for five years each, Ibrahim al-Barbari for three years and Abdul-Amir Jaafar for two years. Three of the four were accused of taking part in an attack on Bab al-Bahrain police station in the capital Manama at the start of the protests in 1994, they added. A blind cleric, Sheikh Ali al-Nakas who is in his 50s, was also jailed for one year on charges of incitement against the government, they said. The court also jailed 10 other protesters, lawyers said, but gave no details."

15 April: Mr. Saeed Al-Asbool, another nationalist figure, was arrested at night. Mr. Al-Asbool was dismissed from his position in the ministry of power in November 1994 following his sponsorship of the Popular Petition that was signed by 25,000 citizens calling on the Amir to restore the elected parliament. When a court decided last year that his dismissal was unlawful, the intelligence department informed him that no civil court can reinstate his employment. Saeed was released a week later.

16 April: The leading pro-democracy leader, Mr. Ahmad Al-Shamlan, who was jailed on 7 February 1996 was put on trial. Al-Shamlan, lawyer, poet and columnist was accused of "encouraging sabotage and arson". The session was adjourned until 21 April.

17 April: A university student, Mr. Mahmood Khalil Ibrahim Al-Moqahwi, from Salheya village, was sentenced to seven year imprisonment after a summary trial. Mahmood, 22, was in his final year of Diploma in Accounting. The trial was held at Jaw prison and his lawyer, Mohammed Al-Watani, spoke to him for the first time half an hour before the trial. On 13 March, the young man was brought back to his residence for a search by the security forces. His relatives in the house spoke of visible signs of torture on those parts of the body that were seen. He also looked mentally scarred. He was accused of stabbing a member of the riot police in the University campus. It was reported that the riot police raided a bus and intimidated female students in the bus and Mahmood struggled with one of the security men.

Clashes re-surfaced in Bani Jamra and Duraz. Earlier clashes were reported in Dar-Kulaib, Sitra, Daih, and other villages. These were organized in protest against the summary trials and arrest of women and children. Six girls from Demestan were arrested in the past few days, one of them is Raja Ibrahim Dhafi, 18 years old.

18 April: Some sixty persons in-charge of religious places (Mattam) were summoned to the Al-Khamis Police HQ. They were ordered to sign papers pledging that they would not allow grievances to be aired in the religious places. Papers were not signed, but the meeting is in



## .. Affront to civilisation

preparation for a decree to be issued by the Amir for monopolizing religious places.

19 April: Demonstrations broke out in Duraz and Bilad al-Qadim. Some distinguished personalities from Muharraq were forced to appear with the prime minister on TV. One person, Haji Ali Ali Al-Arabi refused to attend. On the evening, two of his sons and three of his relatives were detained.

21 April: Around 150-200 people staged a demonstration at 5.00 pm (3.00 GMT) in Sanabis yesterday 20 April. The demonstrators raised posters demanding the restoration of elected parliament and raised large photos of Mr. Saeed Al-Asboul, the nationalist figure who was arrested last week. Also, the demonstrators raised the photo of Hassan Taher who was killed last March in mysterious circumstances. The demonstration reached the main Budaya Highway carrying large placards saying "We Want Parliament" and "Where is Democracy?". Fifteen minutes later, the foreign-staffed security forces arrived in three packed lorries and six jeeps and started attacking demonstrators with tear gas and rubber bullets. The area was sealed-off until 7.00 pm.

22 April: Mr. Al-Shamlan was released awaiting the verdict on 4 May. He was put under house arrest. Mahdi Rabea, a journalist, from Duraz, known for his pro-democracy views was arrested late last year and has been accused of possessing articles critical of the government. He was sentenced for 6 months.

23 April: Eleven people were sentenced for three to ten years on charges of participating in protests. One person was sentenced to 10 years, another for eight years, four received five years each and five received three years. Additionally, four of them were ordered to pay 16,000 dinars (\$42,000) between them.

25 April: The ruling family exacerbated the political crisis by establishing a council to further crackdown on freedom of opinion. The Amir decreed the establishment of a Supreme Islamic Affairs Council to institutionalize the terror campaign implemented against mosques and Shia gathering places (Mattam). The security forces have been attacking mosques for years but in last year these attacks intensified resulting in the virtual banning of prayers and activities in grand mosques and mattams. The constitution of Bahrain states that religious processions and affairs are handled in line with tradition. As part of the faith, imams of mosques and those who preach in mattams are selected and accepted by the public, not by any governmental agency. Religious scholars issued a fatawa (edict) banning any dealing with this illegal body.

28 April: On the day of Eid Al-Adha and in response to opposition call, people in uprising areas of Bahrain staged peaceful processions to mourn the martyrs of the uprising and to protest against the oppressive policies of the ruling family. Processions started on Saturday night (27 April) in Sitra and spread to other areas in the morning the next day. On Sunday 28 April, Eid prayers were performed and people exchanged condolences for the martyrs. The houses of the families of the martyrs were filled with mourners. Similarly, the graves of the martyrs were surrounded by mourners reading prayers and holding peaceful vigils. The foreign-staffed security forces launched savage attacks on mourners and attacked houses randomly arresting any person in the way. In Bani Jamra, the cemetery was encircled by riot police which clashed with mourners. Riot police stormed many houses and randomly arrested all male members of the stormed houses.

## PHRG holds a press conference and launches a major report

Lord Avebury, the Chairman of the UK Parliamentary Human Rights Group, chaired a press conference on 2 April at the British parliament for launching an important report on "The Present Struggle for Democracy and Human Rights in Bahrain". The report entitled "Speak Together for Freedom" covered topics such as historical background, independence, formation and dissolution of the National Assembly, human rights violation between 1975-1990, developments following the liberation of Kuwait, events in 1994-5, treatment of women, governmental response, foreign response and the current situation. The report stated that "contrary to the advice given to the Amir by his friends and allies abroad, there has been no dialogue with the opposition since the summer of 1995, when there was a brief period of calm and hope... only through discussion and compromise will it be possible to avert even worse disturbances". (Copies of the report are available from BFM on request).

The Guardian reported the following on 3 April 1996: "Unrest in Bahrain is reaching dangerous proportions that will bring disaster to the Gulf island state unless the government initiates dialogue with the opposition, a leading human rights group warned yesterday.

Seeking to heighten awareness of the crisis, the Parliamentary Human Rights Group and the Bahraini opposition joined at a London press conference to call on the British government and to urge its ally to end the crackdown on dissent. Ministers at the foreign Office are silent about torture, extra-judicial detention, arbitrary detention of women and children as well as men, exile of dissidents, and hostage-taking which would "arouse fortissimo chorus" of criticism they happened in another region of the world, the PHRG said".

## British Press: people's demands cannot be ignored

The Economist Intelligence Unit published its first quarterly report on Bahrain (can be obtained from EIU fax No: 44-171-837 1850) stating "the government will continue to rely on the baton and the barrel of the gun to suppress dissent. It is unlikely to come up with any imaginative policies to tackle opposition demands. The most it will do is tinker with a government appointed Consultative Council as a way of diffusing the call for reinstatement of the democratically elected National Assembly dissolved by the ruling family in 1975....."

The divisive and indiscriminate policies of the ruling Al-Khalifa family are threatening the stability and security of Bahrain and the Gulf. The International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) issued its annual report stating "the trouble (in Bahrain) began in December 1994 when the Bahraini authorities arrested a number of its citizens who were intending to present a petition to the ruler demanding the restoration of the Constitution and the re-convening of the representative assembly; both had been suspended in 1975. These arrests led to the protests and rioting, largely in the Shi'i areas of the island, which were suppressed with considerable violence by the security forces.... Although concentrated among the more deprived, Shi'a

population, opposition to the government's authoritarian methods is by no means confined to this group.."

In a leading and lengthy commentary entitled "Democracy out of reach" the Financial Times of 12 April (page 17) stated that the ruling family "took a step into the unknown" when on 26 March it decided to execute Isa Qambar. The article by David Gardner vividly describes how the ruling family is mounting its attacks on pro-democracy movement by attempting to link it to "fundamentalist" extremism. It quotes diplomats saying that the pro-democracy movement is "as far from fundamentalism as you could ever want...this is a community movement not a religious movement". The article also quotes a Sunni businessman who said "We want a parliament. Either it is now, in five, 10 or 15 years' time. But the later he [the Emir] leaves it, the more likely it is he'll have to go". The article represents a blow to the ruling family which has been trying to convince the outside world that the ancient-style of tribal feudalism is the best for Bahrain.

On 4 April the "Economist" of London published leading column and article on Bahrain detailing the struggle for democracy and

the suffering of the people of Bahrain. The Economist also covered the leading role played by Bahraini women in initiating and supporting the pro-democracy campaign. In its leading column (page 17) the magazine stated "Citizens of a small but absolute monarchy call, at first, politely, for a small say in the running of their country. Western democracies lend a sympathetic ear? They do not. For the would-be democrats are in Bahrain, Saudi Arabia's little neighbour." The magazine went on to say that "the better advice to Bahrain's ruler would be to show that, while violence must indeed be put down, he is ready to negotiate constitutional changes with men of peace". The article on Bahraini women (page 64) said that "many middle-class women joined the call for democratic reform at the end of 1994. But it is the regime's heavy-handed response to the protest that has made many more Bahraini women, from all classes of society, forget traditional Muslim restraints on female behaviour and become active, often noisy, participants".

The question remains whether any member of the ruling family will ever be courageous enough to admit that the way out of the political crisis resides in adopting modern and rational approach rather than marching backward.



## Champions of Human Rights express outrage in Geneva: Children are abused by the Al Khalifa

Lord Avebury and Foundation Madam Mitterrand led a series of interventions on human rights violation Bahrain during the 53rd meeting of the UN Commission on Human Rights held between 18 March and 26 April.

The French human rights organisation "France-Libertes" of the "Foundation Danielle Mitterrand" delivered its intervention at the annual meeting on 1 April. The representative of the group detailed the torture inflicted on women and children of Bahrain and adopted the cases of several persons who are suffering from ill-treatment and detention. The Bahraini official delegation could not respond to or deny the charges levelled at them by the human rights organisation.

On 16 April, Lord Avebury, the Chairman of the UK Parliamentary Human Rights Group delivered his intervention in front of the Commission. The 52nd meeting of the commission witnessed interventions on Bahrain from many other human rights organizations including the African Commission of Health and Human Rights Promoters, France Libertes, Liberation, Amnesty International, International Commission of Jurists, International Federation of Human Rights, Pax Christi International. The UN Rapporteurs on involuntary disappearance, torture, arbitrary execution and arbitrary detention, have all reported Bahrain for its violation of human rights. Lord Avebury exclusive submission on Bahrain made the greatest impact and many governments' officials rushed to obtain copies of the speech. Lord Avebury said:

(In 1973, Bahrain had a Constitution and a partially-elected Assembly. Two years later, the Amir dissolved the Assembly when it declined to pass a law providing for detention without trial. Since then the Amir has ruled by decree, and opponents have been silenced by exile or administrative detention. In 1994, a coalition of opposition forces organized a petition calling for modest democratic and human rights reforms, which was signed by 25,000 people. When a prominent cleric, Sheikh Ali Salman was arrested for referring to the petition in a sermon, spontaneous demonstrations broke out. The authorities used excessive force against demonstrators, causing many casualties and a number of deaths, and they arrested hundreds. Some prominent figures, including Sheikh Ali Salman, were sent into forced exile.

In the middle of 1995, the authorities negotiated with detained opposition leaders including Sheikh Abdul Amir al-Jamri, a former MP and judge. They reached an informal agreement that the political prisoners would be released and would use their influence to restore tranquility, while the government would discuss the reforms demanded in the petition. However, the ruling family reneged on the deal, tightening the screw by further restrictions on freedom of expression.

Demonstrations resumed when it became apparent, after the National Day of December 16, 1995, that an impasse had been reached. At the same time, security forces began attacking worshippers in the mosques, and an instruction was issued by the Ministry of the Interior to all preachers, not to cover political issues in their sermons. A number of mosques were closed

when preachers defied the authorities, including the Grand Mosques in Qafol and Duraz. All the main opposition leaders have been taken back into custody in late January or early February, in spite of their insistence on peaceful methods and their denunciation of terrorism.

Capital punishment, after being in abeyance for 20 years, has been resumed, and the first victim was a young man whose trial did not meet internationally accepted legal standards. A whole range of offences, some quite trivial like graffiti writing, have been transferred from the ordinary criminal courts to the State Security Courts, where there is no right to call defence witnesses. Defendants may be convicted solely on the basis of uncorroborated confessions, which are routinely extracted under torture. In extreme cases the victim dies, and in 1995, two detainees are known to have been murdered in custody, one of them a school-boy aged 16. The defendant has no access to legal advice until the case is heard; the proceedings are in camera, and there is no appeal. The judgments are not public documents, and consist solely of a declaration of guilt by the court, without reasons.

Every day, an average of ten people are being convicted before the State Security Courts, and sentenced to imprisonment for six months or more after proceedings lasting an hour. Those convicted of arson, we believe on the flimsiest of evidence, are being given three years minimum, plus fines of 16,000 dinars (\$42,000). Because of the secrecy cloaking these proceedings, it is not possible to give accurate figures of the number of detainees. We estimate that at least 2,000 people are detained without charge, among whom are known to be 20 women, and perhaps as many as 500 children. Parents have no access to the child detainees and are not even told where they are held.

The arbitrary detention of women is something totally alien to Bahraini culture. Mrs Mona Habib, the daughter-in-law of Sheikh al-Jamri, was roused by security forces at 03.00 on February 29 and told to report to the Criminal Investigation Department by 08.00 five hours later. The same brutal treatment was accorded to Zahra Ibrahim Salman Helal and to her sister Iman. All three had young children at home, who they had to abandon. Among the children given savage prison sentences are two school girls from Karzakan village, convicted for taking part in anti-government protests. Safeya Ali Darweesh, 16, was given six months, and Nawal Ali Ebrahim, also 16, was given one year.

Restrictions on freedom of expression are severe. Mahdi Rabie, a journalist, was due to appear in court on Sunday, accused of 'publishing and disseminating literature that could disturb security'. It has been made a criminal offence to send 'false' information out of the country, and people believe that the government monitors faxes and emails. Meetings are prohibited, and the press and broadcasting are rigidly controlled by the government.

Collective punishments are imposed on villages where opponents of the government are thought to reside. Nuwaidrat, for instance, has been subjected to encirclement by the police and paramilitary forces, and every house ran-

sacked. Jannosen and al-Dair have been given similar treatment, and Britain's Channel Four News showed an attack on Sanabis in January. Hostage-taking is practiced regularly by the security forces. When Majid Milad was not at home, his wife was taken into custody. The father of Hassan al-Nashit, and the three brothers of Sami bin-Hamad were other examples of relatives taken as hostages.

The ruling family of Bahrain has decided to impose its will by terror and to make no concessions to the democratic movement. They claim that the traditional system, under which the ruler is advised by a group of men he himself selects, and any citizen may theoretically petition the ruler, adequately serves the needs of the state at the end of the twentieth century, as it did in the eighteenth. This is manifestly not the opinion of the people, and the clash between an absolute monarch and the masses threatens the stability of Bahrain and the Gulf as a whole. The necessity to restore the limited human and democratic rights enjoyed by the people of Bahrain more than twenty years ago is imperative.

The Commission should urge the government to resume the dialogue with opposition leaders, so unfortunately broken off last autumn, in a spirit of genuine willingness to concede these basic privileges, which are demanded by the United Nations for all peoples.)

On 18 April, the International Federation of Human Rights (FDIH) and the Arab Organization for Human Rights (AOHR) submitted interventions denouncing the ruling Al-Khalifa family for its violation of human rights. FDIH stated that "Opposition leaders were rounded up in January, along with hundreds of arbitrarily detained people, including women and children. Freedom of expression was more restricted than ever, with the prohibition of Friday prayers and other religious ceremonies, viewed as critical to government policies, as well as the ban on all foreign contact in order to convey information, including human rights abuses".

On 23 April, the human rights organization Pax Christi International (PXI) submitted its intervention stating "the reports on children's situation in Bahrain are alarming. Many children have been dismissed of schools, others separated from imprisoned mothers or forced to live in exile. Among the arbitrarily arrested children, the report of the Special Rapporteur, Mr. Baqir Wali Ndiaye, mentions the case of the 16 years old Saeed al-Iskafi who died after having been tortured and sexually abused on 8 July 1995 whilst in custody in Al-Khamis police Station. PXI urges the authorities of Bahrain to comply with the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child undersigned by their own country".

This international support comes after the decision by the Inter-Parliamentary Union to reject the application of the Bahraini government to register the powerless and all-appointed Consultative Council. The president of the union rejected the application by the Bahraini Government because it had abolished the elected parliament in 1975 and suspended constitutional political establishments.