

BAHRAIN

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

The Al Khalifa boycott GCC, the people continue civil resistance

More serious crisis ahead

When a government makes so much noise about allowing the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to visit the prisons under its control, it becomes clear the extent of bankruptcy of the system. It has been the custom that the ICRC is considered as a buffer zone between two combatants, often sworn enemies. It carried out its humane duty either during ceasefires or away from the battlefields. It seems that the Al Khalifa ruling tribe has decided that it is at war with the people of Bahrain. In normal circumstances sincere governments who respect human rights would allow international human rights organisations to visit their countries and examine the situation. Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and others would easily obtain access to prisons and interviews with high officials. They would attend trials, consult with lawyers and coordinate their activities with the governments. But the Al Khalifa ruling tribe would not tolerate the activities of these reputable organisations in a situation they consider as being a war-like arena. To them, the whole system is at war with the constitutionalists and democrats. There is no common ground with the people of Bahrain, so it is a war to the end with them. Under pressures from their western allies, they have finally allowed the ICRC to oversee the treatment of the prisoners of war (POWs). The international committee wants to ensure that the Bahraini prisoners are being dealt with in accordance with the international norms and conventions.

There is a clear divergence in the stands of the two sides. Whilst the opposition considers itself a constitutionalist: movement with a list of demands that are moderate, legitimate and humane. The Al Khalifa have spared no effort in their attempts to distort the picture and present the movement in a different perspective. They claim that "the opponents are criminals, extremists, foreign-inspired agents, saboteurs, provocateurs, ... etc". They never acknowledged the democratic demands and credentials. This distortion of the facts and the systematic policy of character assassination have serious implications. In a region which is so vital to the world economy due to its oil wealth, the insistence of the Al Khalifa ruling tribe on pursuing the iron-fist policy could only lead to further escalation of tension and instability. So far the Bahraini opposition has exercised wisdom in dealing with the reactionary regime in the country. They have refrained from undertaking violent actions to deter the foreign-staffed riot police which have ransacked homes, sealed villages, desecrated mosques and imposed a virtual martial law in the coun-

try. The opposition has not responded to the merciless killing of 29 citizens over the past two years at the hands of either the foreign forces or the security apparatus headed by the notorious officer, Ian Henderson. It has called for self-restraint on the part of the people who are subjected to unlimited amount of provocation physically, psychologically and in the government-controlled media.

It is ironic to see how the Al Khalifa have behaved on regional level. Their decision to boycott the forthcoming Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) summit in Qatar has alarmed other governments and sent a wave of anger to the Gulf capitals. If they implement their decision, the Al Khalifa will be the first tribe in the Gulf to break away from the annual summit of the alliance. It is clear that the decision to boycott the summit is intended to create pressure on the Government of Qatar in order to force it to withdraw the case of the border dispute from the International Court of Justice, a hope that is unlikely to be fulfilled.

The absence of Bahrain from the summit could only harm the interests of the country, and is not conducive to regional good relations. The Al Khalifa will be more isolated than ever, and the relations amongst the Gulf countries will be further strained. Already the policy towards Iraq is falling apart. In addition to Oman and Qatar which have improved their relations with Iraq and called for the removal of sanctions on Baghdad, the United Arab Emirates have now joined those who are ready to start a new chapter with Saddam Hussain. The Al-Khalifa family sent one of their senior members to Iraq to meet with officials and exchange complementary remarks. The Kuwaitis stand to lose the most in these shifting lines in the Arabian sands, and the Doha summit is likely to become a stormy one. The fear is that their failure within the GCC may spill over the internal front, and the people may become a target for revenge.

The forthcoming weeks will thus be crucial for the Al Khalifa on both the internal and external fronts. What makes the internal situation more depressing to them is the fact that more international businesses are leaving the country and Dubai is becoming more attractive, considering the political stability and commercial incentives. Tens of companies and offshore banking units have moved their offices to Dubai in recent weeks, and the government is becoming more embarrassed as a result. The opposition has not targeted foreign businesses, and has always believed that a more democratic policy will attract more foreign investment.

The opposition has also called for the continuation of the civil resistance campaign in

order to convince the Al Khalifa of the futility of their ill-fated despotism. As the twentieth century draws to a close, it is ironic to see how people are struggling to attain the most basic of political and human rights. The next few weeks will witness an escalation in the political struggle by the people of Bahrain who have decided to continue their peaceful struggle until the Al Khalifa succumbs to the will of the people and acquiesce to the demand to reinstate the constitution.

In the Bahraini calendar, the month of December has always stood on its own, as a period in which political activities take new dimensions. The government may well respond in its customary fashion, but there is a unanimous view amongst politicians, diplomats and journalists that the crisis in Bahrain is ever deepening, and since the most serious and violent security measures have failed, the only way forward is through dialogue and negotiations with the opposition. The opposition has distanced itself from violence, but the Khalifa-Henderson policy is provoking the situation in that direction.

Al-Khalifa's insecurity

The ruling family has decided to put more than eighty citizens on a trial that is expected to start any time. These people were accused last June by the intelligence department of attempting to topple the ruling tribe. A spokesperson for the BFM stated "the ruling family has always felt insecure ever since they came to Bahrain more than two centuries ago. It failed to establish any civilized relationship with the population and has always accused the citizens of attempting to topple its rule".

The ruling family adopted a policy of victimizing the Shia community to derail the peaceful movement calling for the restoration of the parliament. They assumed that both super and regional powers will not oppose the victimization as long as it is confined to a certain section of the community. This miscalculation is backfiring and the uprising is completing its second year on 5 December. It was on such a day in 1994 the people went out on the streets to call for the release of Sheikh Ali Salman who had been detained on the dawn of that day. On 16 December, the ruling family authorized its foreign security forces to shoot and kill demonstrators. Both occasions are commemorated by the people who are more determined than ever to achieve their natural and constitutional rights in the same way as other struggling nations, such as the South Africans, achieved their aims despite all the what such apartheid regimes did

November 1996: ICRC inspects some prisons, ...

1 November:

Some ten thousand people turned to Friday prayer in Duraz grand mosque chanting pro-democracy slogans and calling for restoration of parliament, reversal of death sentences and the release of political prisoners and jailed leaders. The masses responded to a call by the opposition to commemorate the first anniversary of the 10-day hunger strike that was staged by Sheikh Al-Jamri and his colleagues. The gathering was surrounded by hundreds of riot police who pointed their machine guns at the crowd but refrained from shooting. The grand al-Sadiq mosque in Qafool remained under siege and no person was allowed to come near the area.

3 November:

Sheikh Mohammed Mahdi Shams al-Din, the chairman of the Higher Islamic Shia Council in Lebanon, has appealed to the Amir of Bahrain to revoke recent death sentences passed on the three Bahraini citizens who were banned from having fair trials and were prevented from appealing their sentences. Sheikh Shams al-Din appealed to the Amir not to ratify the sentences and to deal with the current situation in a wise way, so that things would not deteriorate further. Ibrahim, the son of Sheikh Shams al-Din also handed a letter to the Amir urging him to resort to political dialogue to exit the crisis.

3 November:

A member of the ruling family presiding over a security court sentenced three citizens to three years (Khalil Mohammed Ali Akbar, 27, Abdul Hadi Ali Ahmad Abdulla, 28, Abbas Ali Rajab, 28) and one citizen (Mhammed Hassan Salman Al-Sari) to six months. The former were accused of clashing with the foreign security forces in Bilad al-Qadim and the fourth was accused of possessing political pamphlets. Ali Hassan Jawad, 16, Jannusan, was sentenced to six months and fine of BD200 (\$520).

A religious scholar from Abo-Quwwa, Sheikh Abdul Aziz was detained by security forces on 3 November following a speech he delivered in Momin Mosque in the capital Manama. The speech highlighted the constitutional aspects of the struggle and called for the release of jailed leaders who calmed down the situation last year.

4 November:

Amnesty International issued an urgent appeal over the fate of three detained UAE nationals, Jasim Isa Al-Yassi, 25, Ahmed Abdullah Makki, 27 and his brother Yasar, 25, who are being held in incommunicado detention in Dubai. The three had been arrested in June along with a Bahraini national, Jaffar Sahwan, who was handed over to the Bahraini government shortly afterwards. "The exact reasons for their arrests are unknown, but Amnesty International is concerned that they may be prisoners of conscience, detained solely because of their relationship to Ja'far Hassan Sahwan".

5 November:

The Bahrain Freedom Movement, Popular Front in Bahrain and the National Liberation Front of Bahrain issued a joint statement stating "The popular protests against the arbitrary sentencing to death of three citizens continue at the same time when lawyers submitted all

evidences proving the inadequacy of the trial and innocence of the accused... Our people are struggling for a just cause: the reinstatement of the constitution, the restoration of parliament, political openness, return of all forcible-exiles and release of all political prisoners".

7 November:

A shop caught fire during a clash in a suburb in the capital, Manama. Amnesty International (AI) issued an urgent action on 7 November calling for the release of Ishraq Habib, the 16-year old girl who was arrested in mid October in a dawn raid on her parent house in Mahooz. Following AI action, Ishraq's mother was allowed to see her daughter for the first time. Ishraq had been physically ill-treated and tortured with clear signs of exhaustion.

9 November:

More people were arbitrarily sentenced by Al-Khalifa judges. Bassel Kadhah Ahmed Abdul Redha, Manama, together with Issam Ahmed and Ghazi Mohammed; were sentenced to two years and a fine of BD16,000 (\$41,345) each.

The foreign minister decided to boycott a GCC meeting in Doha to prepare for the upcoming summit.

11 November:

Fresh attacks were mounted by the foreign security forces on residential areas on the dawn of 11 November. The arbitrary attacks were part of the collective punishment programme adopted by the ruling family in its war against the people of Bahrain. At 4.00 am the undisciplined forces smashed windows of houses and cars and ransacked front gardens in Duraz. The preceding day witnessed renewed attacks on gatherings in religious assembly halls (matams) and mosques in Sitra, Sehla, Bani Jamra, Adhari and Duraz.

Since the arrival of the ICRC, the foreign-staffed security forces have changed tactics. They have been implementing hatred-based punishment schemes on the spot. For example, they attacked Al-Anwari mosque in Daih on 11 November and ransacked its contents. They also raided assembly halls (matams) around the country and ordered congregations to switch-off microphones and interrupted traditional programmes. In Duraz, Sitra and Sanabis, members of the security forces were seen arresting citizens and releasing them at the same time. A 13-years old Ali Mohammed Ali Al-Ekri, who was sentenced last year to 10 years jailed but released following international intervention, is being targeted by the undisciplined security forces. Following a raid on his parent's house, two of his brothers were taken hostages to force the child to hand himself to them. These attacks are fuelling more unrest. Sporadic clashes continued as a result with fires and explosions reported in the past three days affecting the Hyundai cars show room as well as places in Jidhafs, Sitra and other places.

12 November:

A martial court sentenced a citizen for 8 years imprisonment following his detention by military police. Mr. Shawki Ahmad Rashdan Al-Doy, from Muharraq, Mr. Al-Doy works for the ministry of defence and comes from the Sunni community of Bahrain. The ministry of defence has its own intelligence department

and courts system. It also has several prisons, one of them is believed to be underground in the military camps located in Al-Hamalah.

On the other hand a security court sentenced the following citizens: Hussain Mansour, Dair, was sentenced to 18 months jail; Hussain Ahmed Nafa, 16, Jannusan, was sentenced to six months and a fine BD 200 (\$520); Hussain Mirza Hamza, 17, Jannusan, was sentenced to six months and a fine BD200 (\$520).

13 November:

While the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) was conducting its initial inspection visits to Bahrain prisons, a young university student was admitted to hospital suffering from the aftermath of torture. The young person was arrested by the intelligence department three months ago. He has been reportedly suspended upside down for prolonged periods and indecently assaulted by officers under the command of the Director General of Public Security, Mr. Ian Henderson, the Scotsman who has been in charge of the intelligence department for the past thirty years. The details of the latest victim are as follows. Name: Hussain Isa Al-Jazeeri. Date of birth: 28 November 1977. Sex: Male. Personal Identity (CPR) Number: 771101554. Home address: 909 Road 2118, East Rif'a 921, Bahrain. Home Telephone Number: (973) 779190. Nationality: Bahraini. Occupation: Student. Referred to Psychiatric Hospital by Police on 13 November 1996 at 13.00. Location: Psychiatric Department, Ward PG4, Ghazali Male Bed No. 5. Admitting Consultant: Sa'adi Fathi Al-Shami

14 November:

The ruling Al-Khalifa family created a new political crisis by sending a high level delegation to Iraq as part of a developing adversary relationship with the Kuwaitis. A senior member of the ruling family (also a brother of the foreign minister), Slaman bin Mubarak Al-Khalifa, headed a group of businessmen to Iraq and met (14 November) with the Iraq Industry and Minerals Minister, Mr. Adnan Abdul Majid. The Iraqi News Agency reported that "Sheikh Salman stressed the Bahraini people's support for their brethren in Iraq". This move is similar to what the prime minister did in 1993 when he sent a birthday message to President Saddam Hussain. The Kuwaitis had then expressed concern that the monetary assistance given to Bahrain ended-up in "private funds". The latest political adventure angered the Kuwaitis and an internal quarrel has developed with the ruling family circles. The information minister failed to diffuse the situation by stating to Ashraq al-Awsat on 14 November "the names that were mentioned have nothing to do with the business community in Bahrain".

Another political crisis is increasingly boiling with Qatar following the repeated refusal of the government to attend GCC meetings. On 14 November the Amir visited the UAE to meet Sheikh Zaid bin Sultan al-Nahayan in a move to consolidate positions ahead of the forthcoming GCC summit. The opposition believes that the government should attend the summit and should stop weakening Bahrain's positions by pursuing doomed policies on all fronts.

At home, the people have again showed their strength and defiance on 14 November (at

.. Al-Khalifa creates more crises

night) when more than ten thousand people participated in a mass procession in the capital, Manama. The security forces attempted to prevent the religious gathering in a main assembly hall (Matam Ibn-Salloom) but the mass number forced them to retreat. The prime minister had in September forced one of Ibn-Salloom's family to become a member of the powerless Shura Council in an attempt to divide the nation. The message from last night's procession made it clear that the strength of the people is much greater than the security forces ever contemplated. On the other hand the security forces besieged Karbabad to prevent another procession from taking place, but failed to prevent the people from practicing their faith as they did for the last 1400 years under all types of rules and dynasties.

15 November:

Representatives of the Committee for Popular Petition, Mr. Ali Rabea (ex-MP), Mr. Ahmad Al-Shamlan (lawyer), Saeed Al-Asbool (engineer) and Ibrahim Seyid Ali Kamal-u-Din (manager) requested an appointment with the Amir to submit the historic 1994 Petition that was signed by 25,000 citizens. The intelligence department responded instead of the palace by threatening the distinguished personalities that "they will not return home if they attempted to go to the palace of the Amir". The signing of the petition in 1994 was the reason for the organized attacks by security forces against the residential areas. The regime miscalculated all their moves by igniting the longest uprising in Bahrain's history. The government has committed all its aggressive resources in the last two years to prevent the submission of the petition. The opposition has always opted for peaceful approach, but the government has, nevertheless, continued its outdated crackdown policy.

16 November:

the security forces besieged Demestan and intimidated its residents. The village mosque was ransacked and riot police were seen digging in several areas around the mosque. A main road near Sar Roundabout was blocked by a large group of children who picketed in the area to protest against the detention of many children who are known to be in a prison located near the Dry Dock in Hidd. The foreign forces attacked the children using batons. Following their cowardly attack and beating, they the children to sweep the road.

A religious scholar, Sheikh Ali Al-Tayyar was summoned by the intelligence department and threatened of grave consequences if he continued to lead prayers in mosques around the country. Posters distribution and wall-writing have intensified all-over the country ahead of the second anniversary of the uprising on 5 December.

19 November:

Ali Yousif Darwish was brought to Daih in a police jeep and paraded around houses and shops. This is a new method of intimidation that has angered the public and will only ensure that the struggle continues against human rights abusers. The security forces have been experimenting with new techniques in the presence of ICRC. The latter started inspecting prison cells.

23 November:

The following three citizens were sentenced

by a security court presided by an Al-Khalifa person charges of "belonging to an illegal group and distributing leaflets": Mohammed Ibrahim Ahmad Al-Sheikh, 33, was sentenced for one year jail, Abdul Rasool Ibrahim Hassan Mubarak, 37, was sentenced to six months imprisonment, and Hassan Mansoor Al-Hayki was given 3 months sentence.

26 November:

Three police jeeps and two civilian cars surrounded the house of Sheikh Ali Al-Tayyar, 33, in Abo-Quwa and ransacked its content. Sheikh Al-Tayyar was threatened by the security officer Adel Flaifel that he will be taken prisoner if he does not stop leading prayers. The honourable scholar ignored these cowardly threats and led the prayers in Karbabad mosque. After storming his house and that of his father, the scholar was taken prisoner and beaten severely with marks of torture on all his body. The torturer told him that because of ICRC he will be allowed to go home. On 27 November, he was taken for one day for another session of torture, without any interrogation.

27 November:

The foreign minister announced on 27 November that Bahrain will not attend the GCC summit in Doha, due on 7 December. On the same day the Gulf News Agency stated that "Staff Brig-Gen Sheikh Ahmad Bin Salman Al Khalifa, today attended the final stage of the live-ammunition tactical exercise". Both the internal and external situations are being exacerbated by the ruling family.

28 November:

Sheikh Isa Qassim, member of the dissolved parliament, issued a statement calling on the government to take courageous decisions to open up dialogue with the people, to release Sheikh Al-Jamri, his colleagues and all the prisoners, to allow forcible exiles to return home and to put an end to the arbitrary sentencing of citizens.

28 November:

On the evening of 28 November, Samahij and Dair were besieged ahead of a gathering called for by the residents of Samahij to celebrate the birthday of Imam Ali, the cousin of Prophet Mohammed. The celebration is part of the local culture but the ruling family had ordered its foreign security forces to attack and intimidate the citizens. Sheikh Hussain Al-Sayem of Samahij was summoned earlier in the day and threatened by the torturing officers that he will be taken for torture sessions if he attends the celebration. Markh village was also besieged to prevent similar gathering from taking place.

29 November:

The policy of the ruling family continues to drive business away from Bahrain. The month of November witnessed the departure of many firms including the Japanese National Oil Company, Midas Kapit International, Spices Board of India and GBR Bank. Several airlines stopped their trips to Bahrain including Lufthansa, Air Brunei and Royal Air Maroc. Other companies refused to open up their new offices in Bahrain and moved to Dubai. These include Lloyd's Finance, AP-Dow Jones, Thom, VSL Group, CORE, and Scottish Providence. Several other business units left the country last October.

Sick mentality exposed

The mentality of the ruling family is best illustrated by the statements and letters sent international media and political circles. The young ambassador to Britain (also brother of the foreign minister) continues to send letter stating that Bahrainis are not really Bahrainis.

In an interview with Al-Ahram of Egypt (5 November), the Bahraini prime minister attempted to stain the image of the pro-democracy struggle by stating "terrorism aims to halt growth. That is why we call on the Arabs to stand together in facing it and we support the call to hold an international conference to combat terrorism, because it is a disgraceful activity". It is worth noting that this language was similar to the excuses he presented in 1975 when he urged his brother the Amir to dissolve the parliament. John Lancaster of the Washington Post stated in his article on 1 November that "autocratic governments in Egypt, Bahrain and Saudi Arabia face varying degrees of internal opposition; they would rather blame terrorism and unrest on foreign culprits than admit to home-grown problems."

Another example of the misinformation campaign against the pro-democracy movement, the Bahraini Ambassador to the USA, Dr. Mohammed Abdul Ghaffar, sent a letter to the specialized magazine MERIP protesting against a report on Bahrain that described the situation in details. The Ambassador claimed that the ruling family discovered organizations aiming to topple its rule with an Iranian backing. The Al-Khalifa concentrates on mentioning Iran as much as they could to win sympathy in the United States for their war against the people of Bahrain. Joe Stork, the author of he report, replied in MERIP issue No 201, Vol 26 No. 4 (October-December 1996) saying: "Ambassador Abdul Ghaffar's letter does not identify a single instance to support his complaint that my article was 'full of misinformation and false accusations'."

The problem, it seems, is that I do not accept the Bahraini government's reduction of all opposition to an Iranian-sponsored "terrorist" plot. If his government has uncovered "a serious conspiracy" in the name of Hizb Allah - Bahrain, it has failed to provide any evidence. I did indeed suggest that readers should be skeptical of uncorroborated confessions secured from detainees held incommunicado for weeks and months with no access to legal counsel. The ambassador does not help his case by attributing virtually all of the unrest of the last two years to the machinations of this group, a patently absurd charge. The ambassador charges that I had "no credible source" and that I "presented no evidence to substantiate" my critique. My evidence mainly consists of interviews with a wide spectrum of Bahrainis, some in exile but most living and working in Bahrain as professionals, intellectuals, and business people, including some prominent citizens. Unfortunately, given the government's penchant for arresting, or having dismissed from their jobs, persons who speak critically of conditions in Bahrain with Western media, and the government's refusal to allow Human Rights Watch or other international human rights groups to conduct missions in the country, these persons were understandably reluctant to be cited by name."

ICRC must not be use as an alibil by the Al-Khalifa

The government at last signed a memorandum of understanding with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) on 28 October following a promise given to a British minister. As a result, many political prisoners were told that they can meet with their families on monthly basis instead of every three months. The Al-Khalifa ruling family wants to use the ICRC as an alibi for their abuse of human rights. The ICRC insists on the ability to interview all political prisoners and detainees without the presence of officials, the ability to make unscheduled visits and to hold a register for the whereabouts of prisoners and detainees.

In an article published by Al-Ayyam, Nabil Al-Hamar, the person usually used by the Al-Khalifa government to insult the nation, attempted to use the ICRC as an alibi for the crimes committed by the security forces. The extent of torture and oppression is wide-spread and the recent cosmetic improvements in prison cells can not disguise the fact that Bahrainis are living under one of the worst regimes of the modern age. The government also used its stooges to spread rumours that it intends to release some of the hostages on 16 December. The opposition believes that the government is cornered as they could not hold the large number of hostages with the continuous surveillance of human rights organizations. The fact that the reports of ICRC remains secret will not enable the feudal autocracy to white-wash its atrocities in any way or form. ICRC sent a team for conducting preliminary investigations into the conditions of the citizens imprisoned by the ruling family for their demands of political

reforms. Since their arrival on 11 November, ICRC members met with many prisoners in jails who had completed their sentences some months ago but were kept as hostages. The opposition welcomes the ICRC arrival in Bahrain and believes that their presence would alleviate the inhumane conditions of the citizens who are living behind bars. The selection of ICRC rather than any other human rights organisation was based on the condition that ICRC does not question the legality of arrests or the reasons for taking the citizens as hostages in the first place. The ICRC is merely concerned with checking the conditions of "enemies held by the other side".

A spokesperson for the BFM stated "it is sad that the ruling family considers the citizens of the country as its enemies. There are also worries about the scope and remit of ICRC. The agreement seems to state that they will be concerned with those imprisoned for security reasons. The majority of citizens were taken hostages as a result of their demands for political reforms. In the last two years, there appeared to be a decentralised approach for imprisoning people. Some citizens are held by one police station when another security department raids their houses to arrest them again. There are many citizens detained in every corner of the country with no time for creating a central register. It is possible for the interior ministry to prevent the ICRC from reaching out to many citizens by categorising them in different terms".

On 22 November, a spokesperson for the International Committee of the Red Cross

(ICRC) stated to Reuters that the committee started visiting Bahrainis held in Al-Khalifa prisons. "The visits are underway," Rolin Wavre, ICRC spokesman in Geneva, told Reuters. "We will give a figure (for the number of detainees) at the end of our visits, but our conclusions will be discussed bilaterally with the authorities. The accord we signed with the government of Bahrain on October 28 allows us to visit people being detained for security reasons, in accordance with our standard conditions," he added.

The ICRC's terms include the right to interview detainees in private without witnesses and to make follow-up visits. The Al-Khalifa family had chosen ICRC because the latter does not enquire about the legality of detention, something which the ruling family fears.

The opposition appeals to ICRC to investigate all cases and to interview female detainees who were stripped naked during interrogation. Many of these were released but their ordeals have not ended. The opposition also appeals to ICRC to investigate the recent case of Hussain Isa Al-Jaziri (date of birth 28 November 1977) who was transferred to the psychiatric hospital on 13 November following three months of torture. There are news that the young person have been indecently assaulted and was suspended up-side down for prolonged periods. Both the Public Security Directorate and the intelligence department are headed by the British officer, Ian Henderson. The department employs many low-level persons specializing in indecent assaults against Bahraini citizens. A reputable organization like the ICRC must not allow these abusers to get away with crime.

Human rights achieve stability; Death sentences do not

The death sentences passed against three innocent citizens was aimed at intimidating the Bahraini public. The Al-Khalifas have always stated that they aspire the methods of Saddam Hussain. The case of three has polarised the situation against the Al-Khalifa.

More than 130 people in Britain signed a petition that was handed to the Embassy of Bahrain in London last week denouncing the abuses of human rights and the passing of haphazard death sentences. Three citizens (Ali Al-Asfoor, Yousif Abdul-Baqi, Ahmad Al-Kattab) were sentenced to death on 1 July accused of causing the death of seven Bangladeshi nationals. It is now believed that five of them were working in the riot police squad and two were working in a restaurant. The interior ministry buried most of the bodies without allowing the Bangladeshi embassy officials to witness them, which has caused an angry protest against this action. The interior ministry showed the restaurant on TV which was clearly burnt, but the bodies, and even the hair, were not affected. Rumours circulated that the security forces have shot some of its forces after refusing orders. In the mean time, the blaming of innocent citizens went ahead so that the population is victimized for a crime they never committed.

On 1 November, Article 19, the International Centre Against Censorship wrote a letter to the Amir requesting his intervention to stop the execution of the three Bahraini citizens, Ali

Al-Asfoor, Yousif Abdul-Baqi and Ahmad Al-Kattab. Frances D'Souza, the Executive Director, stated "We are concerned by the fact that this law (state security law) contravenes article 40 of Bahrain's law of cassation, which stipulates that any death sentence must be reviewed by the high court and Resolution 1984/50 of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (25 May 1984), which states clearly that: [Anyone sentenced to death shall have the right to appeal to a court of higher jurisdiction]. According to information we have received the trial did not meet standards of fairness as required by international human rights law and by the 1973 Bahrain Constitution. The defendants were held incommunicado for many months, allegedly subjected to torture, and denied access to legal counsel until immediately prior to the opening session of the trial. The trial, contrary to international standards, was held in secret... We appeal to your government to suspend immediately these death sentences."

The Bahraini prime minister, Sheikh Khalifa bin Salman Al-Khalifa held scores of private meetings with members of the unconstitutional Shura Council as well as other individuals to sound their reaction to his intention to go ahead and murder three innocent citizens. The citizens were sentenced to death by a security court headed by another member of the ruling family last July. The Cassation Court, headed by yet another member of the ruling family ruled last month that it had no powers to review sentences

passed by security court.

The Bar Human Rights Committee of England and Wales appealed to the Amir of Bahrain on 4 November stating "We write now as a matter of urgency following the ruling of the Court of Cassation on the 27th October 1996 that it had no jurisdiction over the State Security Court's verdict of the 1st July 1996 when it passed the death sentences.

The Committee had previously expressed its concern about the practice of imprisoning detainees without charge or trial and the trial procedure of the State Security Court".

The British member of parliament, John Gunnel, appealed to the Amir of Bahrain to observe international human rights standards especially in the case of the three persons sentenced to death. Mr. Gunnel said "in the case of the three men in question, I am concerned at the allegations that their confessions were obtained under duress; that they may not have received an entirely fair trial; and that the Court of Cassation, to which the matter was briefly referred on 27 October, can apparently exercise no jurisdiction over the State Security Court decision i.e. there was no right of appeal. I want to make plain that I personally do not consider that internationally recognized and legitimized standards of human rights can in any way be deferred in any part of the world to a period judged more "stable". It is my belief that practicing human rights is a precondition for the stability that we all wish to see".