

BAHIRATON

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

Who dragged whom?

EU-GCC: The battle of will, interests and principles

Last month's session of the UN Commission on Human Rights (16 March - 24 April) was plagued with controversy and deception, mainly because the main players in it had pursued a political agenda incompatible with the essence of human rights. Instead of concentrating on the subject and taking stands as and when deemed necessary the participating countries (53 members and many other non-member states) chose to forge alliances to prevent condemnation or scrutiny. The result was a serious compromise on the issue of human rights to the extent the infuriated the president of the 54th session, Jacob Salibi, the South African ambassador in Geneva. He issued a strong statement expressing dissatisfaction with the performance of the member states during the session urging them to rethink their position with regards to this important matter. The political trading was so audacious that a regime such that of Algeria has escaped condemnation or scrutiny. It was evident that the outraged Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO's) were severely shocked by the attitude of the member states and a serious evaluation of the performance of the Commission should be undertaken. The Human Rights Commissioner, Mary Robinson, felt powerless in the face of a united front forged by the government representatives in Geneva that was determined to prevent serious resolutions against countries that possess economic might such as those of the Gulf states.

The issue of human rights has become a universal one especially during this year which coincides with the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It is true that countries which have become more democratic over the past decade have a better human rights record, but the way towards a more open government is still a long way away. The situation in the Middle East is more gloomy, and in the Gulf it is even worse. The absence of a representative government due to the lack of debate, democracy and public participation all add up to lead to a situation in which dictatorship flourishes.

The European Union which enjoys a leverage over the Gulf states could play a role in pushing the situation in that region towards a more open environment, but it is reluctant to take up that challenge. The status quo, it is argued, is the best of the alternative "evils" embodied in the practice of democracy and respect of human rights. When the EU Troika met last month (29

April) in London with the foreign ministers of the six GCC states, there was a battle between the two sides on who carries whom along. With the heavy political, military and economic weight of the EU, the expectation was high that the three foreign ministers of Britain, Luxembourg and Austria would dig their feet and insist on a partnership with the GCC based on the provision of respect of human rights. However, it became apparent that the heavy economic weights of the GCC states became the decisive factor in determining which way the dialogue with the Troika should go. They insisted on repeated statements arguing that the Gulf region had a "different" culture and tradition that excludes the democratic practices, and should therefore be absolved from the responsibility of conducting an open government. The will to change the status quo was not there. The economic factor became the dominant one in the argument, and the stakes of pushing backward political system in the region to reform from within were considered to be high to take. It will therefore take the courage of principled politicians to insist on affecting a change in the Gulf.

The situation in Bahrain is characterised by all forms of human rights abuses, including the routine use of torture in all its forms, and the lack of the basic freedoms. When the government took up the challenge with the Bar Society (last February) it did not fear outside retribution, and judged that any internal backlash could easily be accommodated. It is the thinking of a regime which believes it has full control on the situation. There have been cries for the reinstatement of the elected executive committee of the Bar Society, but the government has adopted all forms of provocation to suppress dissenting voices. Civil liberties are systematically purged with the aid of huge oil money pouring into the purses of the Al Khalifa princes from other GCC states, while their security arrangements are undertaken with the help of British officers, the latest arrival of whom has been David Jump. In the face of all this, the people of Bahrain have exhibited a high degree of resilience in their struggle and have managed to keep the heat on the regime which has resisted all calls to change. The outcome of such a policy could be catastrophic, not only to the people but to the rulers themselves. The people have the resolve to see through their ordeal, but the future consequences of failing to aid people in need are for anyone to guess. The social fabrics are being threatened by the policies of the government. When a government issues a formal ban on a lecture organised by a cultural club for one of its well-acclaimed ambassadors (Dr. Ali Fakhroo, Bahrain's ambassador to France and a former minister of health and later of education), the situation has become so bad that nothing could be said to justify it. Or when a leading businessman, such as Mohammed Jalal,

with all his business links to the ruling Al Khalifa, receives a formal ban from the director of the Bahrain Monetary Agency not to promote a prize for citizens who achieve well in their lives, the situation becomes even more serious. More dangerously is the news that the detained pro-democracy leader, Sheikh Al-Jamri is being tortured by his captors to force him to sign papers and thence bring him before the kangaroo State Security Court. The ill-treatment of Sheikh Al-Jamri had sent a signal to the people of Bahrain of the worst times to come when the government, comforted (or not restrained) by its allies, decides to push its "luck" further.

It is this adverse political climate that provides the ongoing popular uprising the impetus it needs to remain on track, heading for an eventual showdown with the regime. Although no one could forecast the outcome, such a serious encounter could spiral out of control and lead to a point of no-return between the people and the government. It is the duty of the international community to play a constructive role in stopping the regime from the trail of social and political destruction it has so far managed to create. Geneva is one venue where EU could play a role. London is no less important. The road from London where the recent EU-GCC meeting took place to Luxembourg where the next one is scheduled to be held in November, require the strong will of principled politicians. The help of the democratic countries is needed to bring home to the Al Khalifa the idea that they can no longer fool the world, and that freedom and liberty will, eventually come. Let's hope liberty is achieved through an evolutionary process rather than a revolutionary one that might be brought about by the government's own blindness.

Sheikh Al-Jamri tortured

Reports from Bahrain spoke of horrific torturing of Sheikh Al-Jamri, the pro-democracy leader held since January 1996. It is now confirmed that Sheikh Al-Jamri was taken to the "Investigating Judge" early in April to force him to sign "pre-prepared" statements as a first step to bringing before the unconstitutional State Security Court. Sheikh Al-Jamri has refused to succumb.

The torturers then threatened him of arresting all his family and have gone as far as threatening with "raping" members of his family in front of his eyes. Solitary confinement and sessions of torture involving a British officer, Adel Flaifel and several other torturers have followed these threats. Sheikh Al-Jamri is now suffering from ill health as a result of the ongoing torture sessions.

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April 98: "Political temperature" is set to rise

1 April: The Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) 1st Quarterly Report (ISSN 1351-8682) on Bahrain has been published this week. The 17-page report says, "the political temperature will rise further if a key opposition leader, Abdel Amir al-Jamri, dies in jail. Mr. Jamri, who was imprisoned by the authorities two years ago, is seriously ill but the authorities have so far refused to allow him hospital treatment. However, they have offered to release him on condition that he refrains from further political activity. Mr. Jamri has declined the offer".

4 April: The unconstitutional State Security Court sentenced four girls to three months suspended jail. The girls were forcibly placed in an intimidating cage inside the coastal guard base in Muharrarq with the aim of humiliating the dignified families who were kept outside the base. The girls are Layla Abdul Wahab Wahab Rabea, 17, Amal Ahmad Abdul Wahab Rabea, 20, Meryam Ahmad Ali Balwayee, 21, and Ahlam Seyyed Mahdi Hassan Ali Al-Setri, 20. These girls had been snatched from a house in Sitra-Qeryya last year (26 March 1997), held in incommunicado detention for 20 days and then released after payment of 100 dinar (\$267) each. A fifth woman, Jalila Seyyed Adnan Shubbar, from Karbabad was also sentenced to 3 months-suspended jail on 4 April. The government newspapers said that the four girls and the woman were charge with "illegal gathering" aimed at destabilizing the state security.

4 April: The president of the Arab Lawyers Union, Mr. Farooq Abu-Isa issued a statement dated 4 April denying the reports published by the government's newspapers that he had supported the dissolution of the Bahrain Bar Society. Both Al-Ayyam and Akhbar Al-Khalij of 1 April claimed that the Arab Lawyers Union (ALU) supported the dissolution of the elected Bar Society. The president of the Cairo-based ALU sent letters to leading lawyers in Bahrain including Dr. Abbas Helal, Mr. Hassan Radhi, Mr. Ali Al-Ayyobi, Mr. Ahmad Al-Thokair, Mr. Rashid Al-Jar, Mr. Mohammed Ahmad, and others, confirming the ALU's firm position towards the elected Bar Society and its total rejection of the dictatorial decision to dissolve the society.

6 April, 11.00 am: A group of Bahraini exiles picketed in front of the Bahraini embassy in London demanding an end to abuse of human rights in Bahrain; restoration of the parliament; and bringing to justice the torturers and killers of Bahraini people. Pamphlets and publications had been distributed to the public explaining the extent of misery imposed on the Bahraini nation by the mercenaries and scourts. The pamphlets explained the ransacking of mosques, dissolving the Bar Society, arbitrary detaining citizens, torturing men, women and children, collective punishment, importing more than 40 thousands Syrian Bedouin for changing the demographics of the country, sponsoring dawn-raids against the peaceful people, as well as all form of racism and discrimination in education and employment.

11 April: 11 April: The Amir returned to Bahrain and was received at the airport by senior members of the ruling Al-Khalifa family as well as Ian Henderson, the British officer

who headed Bahrain's security for 31 years. He is now the Security Advisor for the Amir.

13 April: The security forces attacked the art-shop of Mohammed Ahmad Ali Al-Mo'mon, 26, in Karbabad. He was tortured and released after a day of "shock-torture". Shock-torture is a new method where people are taken to a torture cell, beaten mercilessly and then released. These are now widely spread and this method has been devised to avoid the monitoring of the Red Cross and other human rights organizations.

14 April: Concern about the ill-treatment of Mr. Mohammed Jaber Sabah (member of the Committee for Popular Petition), is growing. This comes after Mr. Sabah published a leading article in the Al Quds (London-based), on 14 April, criticising the unconstitutional rule in the country and demanding the restoration of the legitimate and elected National Assembly, which has been unlawfully dissolved against the will of its members and voters for more than 22 years. He adamantly rejected the "Shura Council" calling it unconstitutional and urged its members to reconsider their positions. Mr. Sabah has been harassed and threatened against publishing the article when following a summons by the torturer, Abdul Aziz Atteyat-Allah Al Khalifa (so called Governor of Manama) on 28 March. The latter attempted to intimidate Mr. Sabah and warned of grave consequences if he continues to express his views. Mr. Sabah, is undergoing a critical kidney problem, and people are blaming any deterioration of his health on the government.

14 April: The house of Haji Ahmad Fardan, of Nabih Saleh, and arrested his four sons. His house's contents were destroyed. His sons' names are Faisal, 32, Shakir, 28, Ali, 24, Hassan, 21. The four sons were released two days later.

14 April: Two children were arrested and mercilessly beaten. Abdula Juma'a Hassan, 12, from Karbabad, has been arrested in an early morning raid on his parents house. The armed security forces beat him while his parents were forced to watch their son tortured. Then he was taken to the Budaya'a police (torture) centre without bandaging his bleeding wounds. The boy was accused of "writing pro-constitution slogans on walls". On the same day, at 10am local time, the security forces raided the house once again to arrest another child, Mohammed Juma'a Hassan, 10, brother of Abdulla.

On 15 April, a child and a teenager were arrested and taken to the Budaya'a (torture) centre. They were Ahmed Ali Abdul Hassan, 10, Hassan Abdul Aziz, 13.

Sheikh Mohammed Al-Rayyash, who had been detained in December 1995, under the provisions of the States Security Law, has been transferred to Borj (Tower) solitary cell in Al-Qala'a. On the other hand, the child Majid Abass Habib, 12, who has been arrested two years ago, has finished his sentence's term, but is still in custody without any explanation being given by the Interior Ministry who exercise an absolute grip on the Judicial system.

Ibrahim Ali Mohammed, 27, from Nabih Saleh, (fisherman) was arrested offshore, brought back home, had his house and car ransacked in front of his family, taken for a full day of severe torture and then released on 16

April.

15 April: A dawn raid on the house of the teenager Abass Ahmed Abdula, 17, from Wadyan (Sitra), resulted in the destruction of the belongings of the house. The teenager was arrested after being mercilessly beaten. It is worth mentioning that the teenager had been arrested a year ago when he was 16-year old, and was just released a month ago.

18 April: The trial of the ten people (out of the group of 16) was held and adjourned to 9 May. The families were prevented from entering the courtroom and were not allowed to see their sons who had been severely tortured. The group includes ten people (out of the 16) as well as two additional persons who were being tried in absentia. The ten are: Seyyed Mohammed Redha Mortadha, Ali Darwish Ali, Mohammed Abd Ali, Ali Abul Qassim, Ali Salman Isa, Seyyed Fadhil Adnan Shubbar, Yousif Habib, Jamil Abdul Hussain, Khalil Darwish, Seyyed Saeed Abdulla. The two persons being tried in absentia are: Haji Khalil Darwish (Father of two of the accused in the group of 16), and Abdul Fadhil Ahmad Al-Mosawi.

19 April: The people of Bahrain were surprised when they woke up on Sunday, 19 April, to witness the deployment of army units around the country. Sand bags were stacked in strategic positions with soldiers carrying their machine guns pointed at the houses of the citizens. Jeeps, armoured vehicles, military lorries, logistic supplies, and heavy equipment were at full display near Bahrain National Stadium, Bahrain International Exhibition, Sehla, Karzakkkan, Rifa'a, Sitra and many other areas. The deployment of these military units continued until nighttime. This deployment is coming at a very tense period.

20 April, Reuters reported that "Bahrain has accused its neighbour Qatar of using forged documents to support its territorial claim against Bahrain at the World Court. "...The fact is that Qatar has submitted 82 forged documents in support of its case," said Bahrain's Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohammad bin Mubarak al-Khalifa, in quoted by the official Gulf News Agency on Monday. He said the court at The Hague had set a deadline of September 30, 1998 for Qatar to submit a comprehensive and specific report on the authenticity of each of the documents challenged by Bahrain.

20 April: The authorities inside Bahrain banned Dr. Ali Fakhro from delivering a talk at the Oruba Club due on 20 May. Dr. Ali Fakhro, who is presently Bahrain's ambassador to France and to the EU had occupied the positions of Minister of Health and Minister of Education between 1971 and 1995. The banning came in a letter signed by Isa bin Mohammed Al-Khalifa, head of the General Organization for Youth and Sport. The letter addressed to the Oruba Club said "In reference to your letter of 25 March 1998 requesting permission for a lecture by Dr. Ali Fakhro entitled "I am the Arab Citizen: What to do?", please be advised that this is not permitted".

28 April: The residents of Daih protested against the torture of Sheikh Al-Jamri. The residents blocked the main highway and raised placards demanding his immediate release and the punishment of the torturers.

The Case of Bahrain in Geneva: Session's chairman infuriated

The 54th session of the UN Human Rights Commission started on 16 March and ended on 24 April. Opposition's representatives presented the case of Bahrain to delegates and UN officials.

The Bahraini official delegation was made-up of 14 persons as follows: David Jump; Advisor of the Interior Ministry; Ghazi Mohamed Al-Qosibi, Undersecretary of the Foreign Ministry; Ahmad Al-Haddad, Permanent Representative at the UN; Yousif Mahmood; Isa Bu Qhuwa, Prosecutor General (Ministry of the Interior); Salman Al-Zayyani; Isa Kamal; Ghassan Shaiko; Ahmad Al-Mulla; Said Al-Faihani; Ahmad Arrad; Khalid Al-Khalifa; Salah Musaifer; Mohammed Al-Amer.

UN Rapporteurs and Working Groups mentioned cases of violation in Bahrain. These include: torture, arbitrary detention, lack of judiciary independence and extra-judicial killing. Non-governmental organisations raised the question of Bahrain during their interventions to the session. These include OMCT, France Liberte, Human Rights Watch, Liberation, African Commission for promoting Health and Human Rights, Pen International, FIDH and ICJ.

World Organization Against Torture (OMCT) on 16 April: Ben Schonveld of OMCT said that in Bahrain, at the beginning of this year, at least 50 minors as young as 10 had been reportedly detained in a new wave of arrests by police. The reason behind the arrests appeared to be to discourage anti-regime activities, such as participation in demonstrations or gatherings, painting graffiti, burning tires and distributing pamphlets. The arrests were a part of an official campaign to muzzle political dissent; the use of torture in such circumstances placed those children at extreme risk. The life of children living and working on the streets was another subject of concern.

France Liberte (on 1 April): "We have strongly raised the tragic situation of Bahrain where the State Security Law is being used against citizens with severity. Torture, both psychological and physical, is widely practiced before trying the citizens in front of the State Security Court that does not allow for appeals. These consistent violations urge us to condemn the government of Bahrain and we call on the government to prove its seriousness in putting an end to torture and human rights violations.

Government's Response: On 2 April, a government spokesman, Saeed Al-Faihani, responded by saying that the statement of France Liberte encourages "elements of political extremists". He said that Bahraini prisoners "are not held incommunicado or tortured".

HRW Intervention: Human Rights Watch expressed "deep concern about the alleged gross and systematic violations in Bahrain". HRW said "the exercise of freedoms of assembly and political association remain effectively outlawed. A number of Shi'a community leaders act in the campaign to revive the elected National Assembly are now in their third year of detention without trial, frequently in solitary confinement. In July, and again in December, leaders of the People's Petition Committee were summoned for interrogation and their welfare reportedly threatened after they re-

quested permission to present a petition". "The government routinely attributes the unrest to foreign-backed "terrorists," a term it applies to opposition without distinction. The government also refuses to allow the return from abroad of citizens who express unwelcome political views".

ICJ: The International Commission of Jurists said, "The situation in Bahrain also deserves this Commission's attention. Since the Sub-Commission's recommendation last year that the Commission considers Bahrain under this agenda item, the human rights situation in that country has continued to deteriorate. It is essential that the Commission acts on the recommendation of the Sub-Commission, especially the Sub-Commission followed the Commission's direction and examined only situations which are not on the Commission's agenda".

Pen International: The Sub-Commission has requested that the situation in Bahrain be examined under Agenda item 10. Pen International believes that it is important to establish a mechanism for monitoring the human rights situation in that country. A judge and poet (Sheikh Al-Jamri) is being detained for more than two years for his constitutional demands. Arresting and persecuting writers and journalists are further attacks on the freedom of expression.

The International Federation of Human Rights (FIDH): "In its 49th session, the Sub-Commission adopted a resolution about the human rights situation in Bahrain expressing its concern towards the consistent violations there. The resolution requested from the Government of Bahrain to respect its obligations and also requested this Commission to look into the situation in Bahrain. The government of Bahrain has rejected all calls from NGOs and from the European Parliament. Scores of people were sentenced by the State Security Court, which is headed by members of the ruling Al-Khalifa family. This court bases its sentences on confessions extracted from the detainees under torture. The Government of Bahrain implements collective punishment against those calling for pro-democracy reforms. The FIDH calls on this Commission to answer the request of the Sub-Commission and to initiate a process for monitoring human rights abuses in Bahrain.

Lord Avebury's Intervention (sponsored by the African Commission of Health and Human Rights Promoters): "Bahrain is unique in having reverted from a rudimentary democracy to a dictatorship. The Al-Khalifa family run the country as if it were their private estate, issuing arbitrary decrees and tolerating no dissent". "Last August, the Sub Commission noted "serious deterioration of the human rights situation in Bahrain, including discrimination against the indigenous Shi'a population, extrajudicial killings, persistent use of torture in Bahraini prisons on a large scale as well as the abuse of women and children who are detained, and arbitrary detention without trial or access by detainees to legal advice".

"Since then, there has been no improvement. On February 28, the Prime Minister ordered the dissolution of the elected executive of the Bar Society, after they held a private seminar which was addressed by Dr Monira

Fakhro, a pro-democracy activist who was dismissed from the university when she refused to withdraw her name from a petition asking for restoration of the 1973 constitution".

"The State Security Courts continue to violate recognised principles of law". Bahrain has acceded to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, but treats children of 15 upwards as adults. Even so, much younger children are arrested, detained incommunicado, questioned without their parents being present, and frequently tortured".

"Arbitrary detention continues. Sheikh Abdul Amir al-Jamri, leader of the democracy movement, and seven of his colleagues have been held since January 1996 in the al-Qala prison. One of them, Sheikh Ali Mirza Al-Nachas, died in prison last June from lack of medical attention".

Government's Response: The government's newspapers calmed on 25 April that 53 states meeting at the UN Human Rights Commission in Geneva had not discussed the situation in Bahrain because they "disbelieved" the reports on human rights violations in Bahrain. In fact, the chairman of the UN Human Rights session had summoned the Bahraini delegation twice and questioned them about the violations of human rights in Bahrain.

The Financial Times reported on 24 April: "The operation of the UN Commission for Human Rights came under attack yesterday from its own chairman as well as human rights groups for playing politics rather than making a genuine attempt to promote human rights and tackle abuses. Jacob Selebi, South Africa's ambassador to the UN in Geneva and current chairman of the commission, said it was essential to reform the block voting system which led "people to vote on the basis of group solidarity and not on the substance of human rights abuses".

Mr. Selebi's outspoken attack on the workings of the commission coincided with the accusations by human rights groups that grave human rights violations in Algeria and China have been ignored. Before the six-week commission session, both the European Union and the US announced that they would not sponsor a resolution against China in recognition of progress made and continuing discussions on human rights".

"Private Eye" (17 April 1998): A JUMP AHEAD: "The government of Bahrain which denies all human rights to anyone who opposes it, has sent a mission to the Human Rights Commission in Geneva.

Its star is the new legal advisor to the Bahrain ministry of the interior, Mr. David Jump. Until his recent lucrative appointment, Mr. Jump was a London solicitor at Trowers and Hamlin, a firm best known for its connections to the "river companies" through which the big money was funnelled secretly to the Tory Party (see Eye 826). Perhaps to celebrate the hiring of Mr. Jump by a show of faith in the rule of law, the Bahraini government has just dissolved the executive committee of the island's Bar Society. In its place comes a clique of brown-nosing, government-supporting lawyers under the leadership of Sheikh Isa bin Muhammad al Khalifa, a member of the royal family

Memorandum to the EU-GCC Joint Meeting

Reuters said on 27 April that "the European Union will hold ground-breaking political talks with six Gulf states on Wednesday to try to strengthen relations, British officials said on Monday. They said three EU foreign ministers would meet their counterparts from the Gulf Cooperation Council for talks on Iran, Iraq and the stalled Middle East peace process.

"Our objective is to develop a political dialogue and strengthen it to reflect what we think should be a strategic partnership between the GCC and the EU," a senior British official said on Monday.

"We hope the meeting will create a fuller and franker dialogue," he told a briefing, saying Wednesday's meeting would be the first purely political talks held at such a senior level. The official said particular attention would be paid to Iraq, which is stepping up its campaign to have strict United Nations sanctions lifted. "We want discussions of how the GCC perceive Iraq and the actions it's taking...I think we'll probably find there will be a pretty close identity of views between the GCC and the EU," he said. British Foreign Secretary Robin Cook said last week that the EU wanted "a partnership which will enhance stability in the Middle East to the benefit of both our regions and the wider world." The EU will be represented by Britain, which holds the six-month rotating presidency until June 30, as well as the immediate past and future EU presidents, Luxembourg and Austria.

Opposition Memorandum

His Excellency, the Rt. Hon. Robin Cook
Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and
Commonwealth, London.

Your Excellency

As you meet here in London for the joint ministerial meeting of the EU and GCC ministers of foreign affairs, the people of Bahrain are wondering whether you would examine their case. This meeting takes place, following important developments in the policies of the EU and its member states towards human rights issues. The Bahraini people look to the European Union and its member states for support to their just struggle in view of the EU commitment to human rights and democracy. The special relations that bind the EU with GCC, especially the United Kingdom, can be a strong starting point for the defence of human rights in this strategically vital region.

The joint ministerial meeting is a golden opportunity for discussing this issue. The EU is aware of the seriousness of the crisis in Bahrain, following the European Parliament Resolution of 18 September 1997. The GCC member states are also aware of the plight of the Bahraini people. Hundreds of Bahrainis have fled their homeland and sought refuge in the Gulf States. They are well aware that it is the only government that treats its citizens in a way completely different to the way they deal with their citizens. It is the only Gulf State and may be the only one in the world that banishes its citizens arbitrarily and indefinitely, expose them to systematic torture mistreatment and detain them in incommunicado cells amid harsh conditions.

Around 40 citizens had died in the past four years, either in custody or during protests. The

Government of Bahrain practices an ugly policy of discrimination against the Shia section of the society. The GCC states are aware of all this, and some had conveyed their displeasure to the Government of Bahrain.

The pro-democracy movement in Bahrain, which commenced in December 1994, had been peaceful and has been acting within the framework of the constitution and international norms. More than 25 thousands citizens had signed an appeal addressed to the Amir of Bahrain, demanding the restoration of both the constitution and the parliament (both suspended since 1975), to allow the return of the exiled, to release the political prisoners and detainees, to grant political rights to women and to solve the problem of the unemployment.

The advocates of democracy come from both sects, Sunni and Shia, and belong to various political trends and different social status. They are represented by the Committee for Popular Petition (CPP). They have sought to enter into dialogue with the government, but all their hopes ended in vain. They have been brutally penalized. Some are detained, such as Shaikh Abdul Amir Al-Jamri and Abdul Wahab Hussain, while others are being persecuted and harassed. These include Ahmed Al-Shamlan, Mohammed Jaber Al-Sahab and Ibrahim Kamal-Din. Others were dismissed from their jobs such as Dr. Muneera Fakhroo, Ms. Hessa al-Khameri, the late Ms. Aziza Al-Bassam and Saeed Al-Asbul.

The CPP is still denied audience with the Amir, while the Government of Bahrain boasts that the doors of the Amir are open to all citizens. The Government of Bahrain has been practicing repression against its citizens using collective punishment and ruthless means. Arbitrary detentions of citizens for years are common practice. Banishing citizens is unconstitutional, yet the government never ceased to exile people. The State Security Court is a kangaroo court, which manifests the abuse of the judiciary by the state.

The Government of Bahrain does not tolerate any criticism to its policies. Lately it has dissolved the elected administration of the Lawyers Society, because it insisted on its impartiality and integrity. The media is controlled in the same way as societies are, and thus the people are pushed to underground. Despite all this, the CPP still advocates peaceful struggle and denounces violence.

The recent revelation that Sheikh Al-Jamri is being tortured with threats of "rape" and persecution of his family's members, is an alarming development. International as well as regional peace can only be soundly based on civic peace and respect of human rights.

We look forward to witnessing positive outcome from the Euro-GCC meeting. The UK is assuming an historical direction with the arrival of Labour to power. The UK is better placed than any other power to greatly influence the course of history in the region. The people of Bahrain will surely be grateful to HM Government if the Euro-GCC meeting develop positively in favour of human rights on the ground.

London - 28 April 1998

* Bahrain Freedom Movement

* The Coordination Committee of Popular Front and the National Front in Bahrain

State injustice

Unfair Trials in the Middle East and North Africa (Ref: Amnesty International MDE 01/02/98, April 16, 1998, p 58)

Bahrain: The procedures followed by Bahrain's Supreme Civil Court of Appeal, in its capacity as a State Security Court, have resulted in manifestly unfair trials. This special court routinely violates provisions of Article 14 of the ICCPR, as well as provisions of Bahrain's Constitution. When facing trial before the State Security Court, detainees are denied access to legal counsel from the moment of arrest until they are brought to court. This means that although defendants may appoint lawyers of their own choosing, the first contact can only happen on the first day of trial, just moments before the opening session. This violates Principles 15 and 18 of the UN Body of Principles.

Clearly, inadequate time is given for the preparation of the defence. Moreover, defence lawyers are not granted access to court documents before trial, so they can not familiarize themselves with the facts of the case before meeting their clients for the first time in court. Even after the first session, defence lawyers have only limited access to their clients. Trial hearings are often held in camera. During trial, the State Security Court is not required to summon witnesses to give evidence or for cross examination. Such evidence may be submitted in writing. Defendants can be convicted solely on the basis of uncorroborated confessions given to police or security officials, even in cases involving the death penalty, and even when there appears to be evidence that such 'confessions' were extracted under torture. To date, it appears that no thorough and independent investigations into allegations of torture, which have been both frequent and consistent, brought by defendants has ever been carried out. Under Bahraini law, there is no right to appeal to a higher tribunal against conviction and sentencing by the State Security Court.

British position reaffirmed

The Bahraini Foreign Minister, Sheikh Mohammad bin Mubarak Al Khalifa, failed drastically in his mission to London on 29 April. The British government has reaffirmed its commitment to international conventions on political asylum and rebuffed the minister when he asked for the Bahraini political refugees to be expelled from Britain.

The Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, Mr. Derek Fatchet, had earlier called on the Bahraini government to ratify human rights conventions. These demands were contained in letter sent last month to the Scottish Human Rights Centre. Mr. Fatchet said "As I made clear in an Adjournment Debate in the House of Commons on 3 June, I am concerned about Bahrain's human rights record". He clarified that "Robin Cook made clear to the Bahraini Minister of Foreign Affairs on 1 September that if Bahrain did not address the legitimate concerns of the international community, by making progress in such areas as freedom of speech, of the press, and of assembly, resolutions such as the one in August (by the UN Human Rights Sub-Commission) would be inevitable. He also urged Bahrain to accede to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights".