

BAHRAIN

Issued by the "Bahrain Freedom Movement" to promote human and constitutional rights

Membership of UNHRC: Opportunity to address Bahrain's HR wrongs

The human rights situation in Bahrain is causing serious concerns within the Non-Governmental organizations in the filed. After a lull in the violations of people's human rights for three years, the Al Khalifa hereditary dictatorship has resorted to policies of repression to silence public dissent and prevent the emergence of a viable opposition to its antiquated rule. Their plan has not worked. In the past few months scores of young citizens were heralded to torture chambers by the mercenaries of the regime, inflicted heavy torture on most of them before they were sentenced by Al Khalifa judges to lengthy prison sentences. Furthermore, the regime has resorted to a dirty campaign to smear the personalities of prominent opposition activists. Last month, Abdul Rauf Al Shayeb, the President of the Popular Committee for Martyrs and Torture Victims, was unlawfully arrested, maltreated, threatened with dire consequences, before being released the following day. The arrest came after Mr Al Shayeb participated in a TV show and highlighted human rights violations in the country. At the same time, other prominent figures were subjected to a campaign of smear, including the dispatch by regime agents of thousands of text messages written in dirty language against them.

The people of Bahrain have been disheartened by the appointment of Bahrain to the UN Council of Human Rights which has replaced the UN Commission of Human Rights. It is reported that large amounts of petrodollars were used to buy the votes of some Asian countries in return for voting in favour of the candidacy of both Saudi Arabia and Bahrain to the world body. The Al Khalifa have attempted to exploit their membership to gain more favorable status within the world community in terms of human rights. This is a two-edge sword. Bahraini activists are now addressing their complaints not only to NGOs but to the Council members and the UN Watchdog with detailed description of human rights abuses in the country. The continued attacks on human rights activists and detention of pro-democracy activists has become a rallying case for the newly-rejuvenated opposition. After five years of extensive campaigns of deception, supported by the US and UK, the

political programme adopted by Sheikh Hamad and his clique has not only faltered but led to the rebirth of a new breed of political opposition that has transcended ideological, political and religious barriers. The inception of Haq (Legitimate Rights) movement six months ago has galvanized the political spectrum into a unified movement that is based on national consensus.

After the repeal in 2002 of the country's constitution by Sheikh Hamad and his backers, the society was further fragmented by the formation of tens of ineffective societies on the basis of political, ideological and sectarian convictions. The society thus became more divided as these societies competed for membership, favours from the ruling family and approval from international bodies. It was one of the most divisive tactics that aimed to destroy the national unity. Over the past eight decades, the people of Bahrain have managed to safeguard the national unity by their insistence on a national political agenda and rejection of divisive and trivial limited objectives, based on ethnic or religious specificity. The Al Khalifa have all along refused to accept the existence of a national consensus linked to democratic objectives. They never agreed to meet a delegation representing the Shia-Sunni Islamist-liberal alliances. A national consensus was deemed destructive to their political agenda. The founding of political society in the 2001-2002 period helped them to achieve this objective.

It is now argued that the one of the biggest mistake committed by the regime has been the imposition of the new Law of Societies which forced all societies to declare their acceptance of the Al Khalifa constitution of 2002. To their dismay, that step has led to the crystallization of a new breed of opposition that has opted to operate outside the official perimeters. When the four political societies decided to go along with the Al Khalifa law, their grass roots rebelled and decided to go it alone in the struggle for democracy. The Haq Movement was thus formed to replace the divided opposition bodies with a unified umbrella that has transcended the ideological and religious divide. The movement has

now become a rallying force for the opposition which is gradually recovering from the post 2001 trauma. Its members, drawn from among the disenchanted activists of other societies, have vowed to continue the struggle on new grounds, calling for real democracy and attracting the international community into the political foray. The popular petition that was introduced earlier this year addressed to the UN and asking for its intervention as an arbiter in the struggle between the people of Bahrain and the Al Khalifa has crystallized the emerging young activists into a formidable force that has succeeded in presenting an international appeal that has attracted the attention of the world leaders. Another petition is being organized and will be signed by the victims of torture who want to address their grievances against the Al Khalifa torturers to the UN Human Rights Council. A process of internationalizing Bahrain's political strife has thus taken root among a wide spectrum of people.

It is now time for US and UK to re-examine their stands regarding the political situation in Bahrain, review their counter-productive support of the Al Khalifa and listen carefully to the grievances of the people of that country. The Al Khalifa have proven to be an embarrassment even to their own allies, and it is time that these allies contemplate a policy of disengagement with these despots. The Bahraini opposition has succeeded in re-organising itself, present a more progressive agenda to the people and the world and remove the constitutional legitimacy from the Al Khalifa hereditary dictatorship. The past five years have confirmed, once again, the inability of this dictatorship to adapt to modern-day codes of democratic practices, ignored the people's pleas for real reforms and precipitated a security crisis in the region by giving Bahraini citizenship to thousands of people from areas known to be breeding grounds for extremism and terrorism. It would be irresponsible of the great political powers to continue supporting this dictatorship and are urged to review their policies before Bahrain is turned into a safe haven for those intent on destruction and blind terrorism. The Al Khalifa regime is an accomplice in this crime, let us all join hands to stop its excesses.

Arrest of a human rights activist sparks international concerns

On the evening of 22nd May, the human rights activist, Abdul Ra'oof Al Shayeb, was arrested on orders from the Al Khalifa rulers. He was trying to cross the causeway to Saudi Arabia when the mercenaries snatched him to unknown location. Nothing was heard about him during the arrest. He was released on the second day as international pressure was building on Bahrain's dictatorial regime. On the day of his arrest, Al Shayeb was summoned to the torture centre, but refused to go. Prior to his arrest, he issued the following statement.

The arrest came as the Al Khalifa attempt to crush the demands by torture victims to prosecute their torturers who are sheltered by the ruling family, and in some cases, promoted to senior positions. Al Shayeb is known for his insistence on the prosecution of these torturers. His arrest highlighted the need to put pressure on the UN Human Rights Council to expel Bahrain from its membership as it is a state which has more than thirty prisoners of conscience who have campaigned for an end to the Al Khalifa dictatorial rule.

Human Rights activists were urged to intervene as a matter of urgency in this matter, condemn the unlawful arrest, call for the immediate release of Mr Al Shayeb and end the state terrorism in Bahrain under the Al Khalifa hereditary dictatorship.

Testimony of Abdulraoof Al-Shayeb

It is at 1500 hrs local time today Monday 22nd May, three security individuals wearing dark black glasses, belonging to Criminal Investigation Bureau (CIB)-Ministry of Interior, in civilian clothes, came to my place in Manama. My son replied to the bell when they asked about me. When I answered their call, they verbally asked me to attend CIB tomorrow (Tuesday) for interrogation and before transferred to the Public Prosecutor. They brought a piece of paper (call of presence) having my name and place of attendance without indicating the reason. They asked me to produce my receipt signature. I returned the piece of paper of paper telling them that I will not attend unless I know the reason and the crime I am facing. One of the security men said that there is no crime, but there is interrogation and that I will know the reason when I attend. I replied to him that how come there is interrogation without accusation. It is better that they go back to who ever sent them and come back with another paper indicating the reason for attending CIB.

It is worth mentioning that I recently had a participation at "Al-Hurra" TV channel in a special program about the new UN Human Rights Council and the nomination of States well known of their violation to human rights. The program focused on targeting activists in the Arab region, when I was

identified as a victim of such campaign. Participation in Al-Hurra came after the dialogue session carried out by Alwasat newspaper in Bahrain, where I was interviewed as chairman of the National Committee for Martyrs and Victims of Torture. The interview was focusing on torture, reparation and transitional justice, which was sponsored and organized by the committee in the presence of well known experts in the field. I also had a recent participation in the procession and commemoration of Martyr Salman Al-Majed organized by people of Demistan

villege, at central west coast of Bahrain.

This has coincided with my judicial motion on the defaming carried out by many parties in an attempt to defame me and my family as well as undermine my human right activities in the activities of National Committee for Martyrs and Victims of Torture, which I chair for the current session.

Lastly, I hold the party, which sent its messengers today, the full responsibility of endangering wellbeing and safety of myself and my family.

Detainees beaten following Appeal trial

Defense Lawyers Threatened by Judge with Disciplinary Action
Bahrain Centre for Human Rights
REF: 22050613

The second Appeal Trial of the "Daih Detainees"(Ref: 02010606), took place this morning, 22nd of May, 2006 in the Second Criminal Supreme Court with Judge Ebrahim Al-zayed presiding. In a previous trial, the defendants were sentenced to one year imprisonment following random arrests that occurred after unrest resulting from frustration over the "Airport incident"(Ref: 19040609),.

The legal coordinator of the Committee of Relatives of the Detainees Mr. Mo-

ammed Al-Jishi told the BCHR that the Defense Counsel was repeatedly interrupted during their cross-examining of a witness presenting by the prosecution. Any questions attempting to discredit the witness were prohibited or overruled. The Judge repetitively silenced the defense counsel and after a brief quarrel between the Judge and the defense the Judge threatened one of the defense lawyers, Ms. Fatima Al-Hawaj, with disciplinary action if she continued. The Session was thereafter postponed to the 28th of May, 2006. Following the trial, the defendants were reportedly denied permission to speak to their families who were not permitted access to the court. After a short protest from the detainees, the security forces reacted by beating the detainees in front of members of the press and gathered family, thereafter removing them by force and returning them to prison.

The defendants were:

Jaffar Abduljabbar Jaffar, 24 years, Daih, Ahmed Yousuf Ahmed Nasser, 26 years, Daih, Mohammed Abdulsool Ahmed Ahmed, 30 years, Daih, Abdulla Madan Ahmed, 26 years, Maameer, Mohammed Hassan Yousuf Saif, 24 years Manama, Ali Jaffar Jassim, 20 years, Daih, Jaffar Hussain Mahmood Yousuf, 25 years, Maameer
The Bahrain Centre for Human Rights is gravely disturbed by the security forces unjustifiable harsh treatment of the defendants during this trial as well as previous ones. The Security Forces have repeatedly used unnecessary force to remove handcuffed defendants from the courthouse. And today's trial provides further evidence that the Bahraini court is far from independent in will. Chances that these defendants, as well as others who stood trial in the past few months, enjoyed a fair trial is highly questionable, therefore prompting the Centre to call for their release, as the Bahraini Judicial System does not provide a just and fair trial.

HAQ unravels the Truth about HR and democracy

HAQ-the Movement of Liberties and Democracy, issued a comprehensive document about the human rights and democracy record in the past five years. The report contains documentation of all violations to human right and democracy values carried out by the Bahraini Authorities. It is to be noted that Bahrain has applied for membership of the new UN Human Rights Council, whose election will be held on May 9, 2006.

On the 5th April 2006 pledged for membership of the new UN HR council, Bahrain representative said that Bahrain is " a firm advocate of the promotion and protection of human rights" and that it "has a large and vibrant community of nongovernmental organizations, a number of which are concerned with human rights issues" . Is Bahrain advocate, promote and protect human rights? The answer to this question is obtained by recalling the record of practices, legislations as well as assessing stance of the State on many human rights issues, which has been reported by the international

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Suspicious silence by NDI after the closure of Manama office

Last week it was announced that the office of the National Democratic Institute (NDI) in Bahrain had been ordered to cease its activities. No rational reason was given either by the Al Khalifa ruling family or NDI's officials except that the office had not been registered with the Ministry of Social Affairs. It was a ludicrous explanation which was intended as a cover up for the real reasons. The officials running the office also failed to comment, giving much room to speculations. The people of Bahrain are awaiting explanation, not from the Al Khalifa rulers, but from NDI officials who had worked relentlessly over the past five years to promote the ill-fated political programme that has solidified the Al Khalifa grip on the country and the people. They have lobbied the political societies a convinced them to participate in the political show, holding seminars, courses, debates and professional lobbies. Together with the American Ambassador in Manama and covert operations by US intelligence, the NDI has helped the Al Khalifa dictatorship in every possible way. It is thus inconceivable that they have been simply told to quit for such a trivial reason.

If the NDI has really been pushed out by the Al Khalifa, then, as a pro-democracy institution, they have to speak out against the Al Khalifa dictatorship, expose their

despotism and enlighten the American officials and public of the reality of the political situation in Bahrain. Failing to do so will only confirm the widely-held suspicion of an American role in proping up a hereditary dictatorship and a possible acquiescence in the attack on pro-democracy activists and the imprisonment of tens of innocent Bahrainis.

On another level, news from the inner circles of the ruling family indicate a state of tension as international media started to shed light on the internal situation in Bahrain and highlight the failure of Sheikh Hamad's political programme. The article published by The Financial Times on 8th May titled "Bahraini royals under fire over development of offshore reefs" and "Bahrain's dawn of democracy proves false for Shia" on 3rd May, both by the newspaper's correspondent in Cairo, William Wallis have led to a feeling of desperation and failure within the family. It is now reported that new measures have been taken against at least one British "advisor" at the Ministry of Information after being accused of incompetence in selling the Al Khalifa's false story to the outside world. He is winding down his presence in the country, and is said by colleagues to be extremely bitter at the way he has been treated.

Meanwhile, the Al Khalifa ruling family has imposed a new law curtailing the

freedom of congregation and making any meeting of which the Al Khalifa are not informed at least three days in advance is illegal act. This does not apply only to demonstrations or pickets but also meetings at homes, clubs and societies. The law has come only few weeks after Kuwait had repealed its notorious law of congregation which was imposed by the Al Sabah ruling family in 1979. The Constitutional Court ruled it illegal and members of Kuwaiti parliament welcomed the decision with relief. Members of Bahrain's Shura Council (half of whose members are elected in an engineered way) took the line of the Al Khalifa and approved this notorious law.

The people are in a state of rebellion against the Al Khalifa dictatorship. Demonstrations have continued in the past few days against the continued practice of arbitrary detention and illegal imprisonment of more than thirty prisoners of conscience. Demonstrations, pickets and other civil actions are taking place almost on daily basis and a state of tension is dominating the political scene. The people have appealed to the newly-formed Human Rights Council to take steps to sanction the Al Khalifa for their black record on human rights. Bahrain has become a member of the Council earlier this month, and the people of Bahrain want to expose the reality of Bahrain's situation.

More HR violations after Bahrain's UNHRC membership

Calls have been made for the international community to take serious steps to curtail the mounting human rights violations by the Al Khalifa hereditary dictatorship against the indigenous people of Bahrain. This call came as Bahrain became a member of the newly-formed Human Rights Council alongside many countries known for their poor human rights record. It also came as the ruling family continued its semi-secret trials of peaceful demonstrators campaigning for decent economic and political life. As the trial began on 12th May of 17 innocent young men, two human rights activists were escorted out of the courtroom which is under the direct jurisdiction of the ruling family. Family members of the defendants were not allowed in, and only few hand-picked persons were admitted to give the false impression of the openness of the court. The defendants are expected to be given harsh sentences by the ruling family which controls the judiciary and dictates its verdicts and sentences. Those who are on trial are: Mr. Moosa AbdAli, 24 years, Ekr, Seyed Mohammed Mustafa, Jidhafs, Majeed Ali Al-Tashani, 32 years, Bilad Al-Qadeem, Salman Najji Salman, Al

Hamala, Hussain Mohammed Ahmed, 23 years, Al-Hamala, Ahmed Abdulla Ahmed, 28 years, Hamad Town, Hussain Ali Hassan, 26 years, Al-Nuwaidrat, Mohammed Jassim Khalifa, 16 years, Sanabis, Ahmed Jaffar Al-Metghawi, Diraz, Jaffar Nuuh Smakhar, 22 years, Al-Malchya, Hassan Abdulla Al-Afoo, 19 years, Nuaeem, Hassan Ali Hamada, Nuaeem, Faisal Abdulla Hassan Mohammed, 20 years, Nuwaidrat, Hilal Ali Muahammed, Alganabya, Saqeq Hussain Jaffar, 19 years, Manama, Ahmed Jaffar Al-Qassab, 17 years, Nuaeem, Mr. Qanee Saleh Abdel-nabi Saleh, 26 years, Sitra,

Few days earlier, a young Bahraini citizen, Seyed Ali Majeed Esmael, was summarily sentenced to two years imprisonment for taking part in a peaceful demonstration at the airport earlier this year. It took the ruling family only 48 hours to try and sentence this indigenous Bahraini.

As the anti-Al Khalifa sentiments show no sign of abating, the regime has resorted to more repressive measures against the indigenous population, especially the Shia Muslims. Last week the prime minister issued Decree 24/2006 nominating 56 people to various posts at the Ministry of the Interior. The long list

did not contain a single person from the Shia community. The policy of discrimination on sectarian basis has become more institutionalized since the present ruler inherited the rule from his father in 1999. Despite international condemnation of this policy, the backers of the Al Khalifa, especially the US and UK, have failed to take any step to scrutinize this oppressive regime.

On another level, the Al Khalifa have closed down the office of the US-based National Democratic Institute (NDI), and expelled its manager, Fawzi Julid. The office has been promoting Sheikh Hamad's political programme, but has become its officials have become disillusioned in recent months as they see absolute dictatorship maintaining its grip on the people. It is not yet clear what steps the US would take against this tyrannical system after it had failed to deliver on earlier promises on reforms and openness.

Meanwhile, civil resistance activities have continued and are likely to intensify in the coming weeks and months. A peaceful demonstration was held on Friday 12th May in protest against the continued detention of more than thirty political prisoners who are have been taken hostages by the Al Khalifa in the past six months.

Bahrain's dawn of democracy proves false for Shia

By William Wallis
The Financial Times, 3rd May 2006

A few blocks away from the new waterfront developments that Bahrain's rulers hope will secure the kingdom's future as a regional banking centre, there are signs of budding revolt.

Wearing balaclavas to mask their identity, young men with no stake in the capital Manama's rising skyline, spend their evenings burning tyres, hurling stones and blocking traffic into the shabby, outlying villages where they live.

The demonstrations are regular and small - barely 50 Shia protesting against discrimination. But they have been preceded by much larger protests and are symptomatic of steadily rising tensions on an island squeezed between the competing influences of Iran and Saudi Arabia, with close ties to Iraq and income disparities that coincide with a deepening sectarian divide.

While the circumstances driving a wedge between Islam's predominant sects are particular to Bahrain, the poorest of the Gulf's oil producers and the only one with a Shia majority, some of the symptoms have blown in from elsewhere: Sunni extremist pamphlets distributed at a school suggesting the Shia are an aberration; newspapers and mosques that interpret events in Iraq from a sectarian perspective; and posters, in the same shabby Shia suburbs, of Iranian clerics calling on the faithful to "defend their beliefs with their blood".

Bahrain had its "dawn of democracy" in 2001, several years before Washington looked hopefully for a thaw across the Arab world. But for the Shia who make up about two-thirds of the island's 470,000 native population, it has proved false.

Rather than hastening change, the empowerment of Iraq's Shia majority and muscular assertion of Iran's influence in the region have made Bahrain's ruling Sunni minority more cautious.

After inheriting power in 1999, King Hamad ibn Isa al-Khalifa, Bahrain's Sunni ruler, released political prisoners and welcomed back pro-democracy activists forced into exile when his father crushed a wave of unrest in the 1990s.

He then invited Bahrainis to vote on a new social contract. But the resulting constitution, with the absolute powers of the ruling al-Khalifa family unchecked by a new and toothless parliament, fell short of expectations the king himself had raised.

As parliamentary elections approach for the second time in four years, hopes for a political system that gives the Shia a fairer share of wealth, land and power have faded and for young Shia, the pros-

pect of earning a decent wage remains bleak.

At current trends, 35 per cent of Bahrainis will be unemployed by 2013 and 70 per cent in jobs incommensurate with their expectations and skills, according to a report by the consultants McKinsey. "It is this and the gap between wages and the cost of living that gives rise to frustration for the layman, more than constitutional issues," says Abd al-Aziz Abul, a Sunni opposition leader.

The government has started talking about unemployment as a priority, raising the minimum wage and allocating 30m dinars (\$80m, €63m, £43m) towards training programmes. But more radical proposals face resistance from elites with a vested interest in cheap imported labour from Asia or income from selling visas, while the most glaring discrimination has been left intact.

According to the now banned Bahrain Centre for Human Rights, only 18 per cent of senior public sector and government positions are held by Shia. Shia are in effect barred from the security services, while the ranks of the police and army are filled by Sunni recruits from Yemen, Jordan, Syria and Pakistan. Shia and Sunni opposition leaders believe the practice of awarding these immigrants nationality as a means of altering Bahrain's demographics continues.

They also complain that gerrymandering has made it impossible for the main Shia-backed el Wefaq National Islamic Society to win a majority in the elected lower house despite their numeric advantage. This was one of several reasons el Wefaq boycotted the last elections in 2002.

The most senior Shia cleric, Sheikh Issa Qassem, has urged his followers to use peaceful means of protest. But, allied to him, the youthful and moderate Islamist cleric, Sheikh Ali Salman, who has led el Wefaq into an alliance with other opposition including leftists and Sunni, says the lack of results is driving growing numbers of young Shia towards more radical agendas. Borrowing a proverb from Yemen, he says the government has lifted the muzzle from Bahraini mouths but placed it instead on their own ears. "We are free to speak now but there is no real dialogue, no real change," he says.

The likelihood that el Wefaq will nevertheless participate in elections this year - partly, some members say, to counter Sunni fundamentalists in parliament - has divided the opposition.

Harakat Haq, a new, mostly Shia, group, questions the legitimacy of the ruling Khalifa family. Some activists now openly espouse republican ideals.

For hardliners in the royal family, who have argued since the Iranian revolution that Bahrain's Shia would take a mile if

given an inch, this hardening of dissent validates a more ruthless approach to preserving the status quo.

For moderates - both Sunni and Shia - concerned with preserving the kingdom's stability through gradual change, these are worrying signs that the opportunity for compromise is slipping away. The next article in the series will look at Saudi Arabia

HAQ unravels the truth

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organization (listed in Appendix B of the report).

Requirements of Democracy include "respect for human rights - civil, political, economic, social and cultural - including freedom of expression, freedom of the press, and freedom of religion and conscience; access to and free exercise of power in accordance with the rule of law; the holding of periodic free and fair elections based on secret balloting and universal suffrage monitored by independent election authorities; freedom of association including the right to form independent political parties; separation of powers, especially an independent judiciary; and constitutional subordination of all state institutions, including the military, to the legally-constituted civilian authority".

The report covers many of the above issues, mainly from human rights point of view. These include unilaterally drafted and imposed Constitution empowering the ruler, head of Government since 1971, judiciary system as means of repression, emptied democracy, marginalizing people's well and gerrymandering, laws of restricting freedom and rights, non-compliance with international agreements, maintained restrictions and control of media and press, continued banning citizens from traveling, targeting activists and defenders of rights, administering discrimination and protection of torturers, exiles's rights, political naturalizations and statelessness, and intimidation and harassing civic societies.

The report contains three appendices; A- list of publications barred publications barred at ports and confiscated from book fairs shelves

B- report and Studies by international human rights organizations about BAHRAIN

C- some media coverage about travel ban list

The report concludes remarks and demands to enable Bahrain to be elected as a member of the new UN Human Rights Council and be a model for democracy and human rights.