

BAHRAIN

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

Together against occupation and dictatorship

As the Israeli aggression against Lebanon continues, the people of the world have saluted the steadfastness of the brave people who are defending their homeland, and expressed total dismay at the US support to this state terrorism. Over the past few weeks the world has been watching non-stop Israeli bombardment of civilian targets, destroying residential buildings, airports, roads, bridges, schools and hospitals. The Zionists have gone further. They have deliberately attacked United Nations posts killing at least four UN observers and wounding scores others. The UN Secretary General's protests have gone unheeded. This is a war against humanity, aided and supported by the most powerful power on earth. Is it going to sort out the protracted Middle East problems? Or is it merely an exercise of state terrorism aiming to induce fear in the hearts and minds of the people of the region? Whatever may be said to justify this blatant aggression by the US and Israel, the world, has once again, witnessed how the Bush administration stood alone in Rome to defend this terrorism, and how other world leaders simply refused to take a stand against the unholy alliance between the two powers of evil.

What is more painful is the attempt by Condoleza Rice, the US Secretary of State, to try to sell this aggression to the world arguing that her government stood to "support forces of peace and forces of democracy". This abusive use of words to describe aggression and evil policies would have broken the heart of great people like Martin Luther King who stood for equality in the face of the US racism of the past decades. He would not have envisaged that his legacy would be snatched by people like the present Secretary of State who owe their position to the struggle of their great ancestors who opposed state terrorism and aggression. Those people sacrificed their lives to attain a degree of justice to their fellow blacks who were treated by the state as underdogs. Today, their successors have become more brutal in their stands than their masters, and it is a sham against democratic values and the principles of people like Martin Luther

King. Ms Rice has followed in the steps of her predecessor, Colin Powell who tried to cover the US illegitimate war against Iraq by raising the slogan of "democracy partnership" with the Arab world, only to increase his government's support to despots and hereditary dictatorships that have suppressed the aspirations of people for decades. Ms Rice is, once again, trying to divert the attention of the people of the world away from the ongoing slaughter in Lebanon at the hands of the Zionist occupiers, by raising the slogan of "New Middle East". At the same time, her government is supplying the Zionists with the most devastating bunker-buster bombs to kill and maim more innocent people. These merchants of death have no limits in their enmity to humanity.

As for democracy, it has become a doctrine void of value or meaning. To the Bush administration, dictatorships, such as that of the Al Khalifa in Bahrain, are the "beacon" for democracy. He and his administration appear to be blind to the reality, and appear to sanction the continued authoritarian rule. Bahrain is ruled by this hereditary dictatorship that has been emboldened by US increased support in recent years. The prime minister has been in his post for 35 years unchallenged. Out of 22 cabinet ministers, 11 are members of the Al Khalifa clan. Yet, the Bush administration views this totalitarian rule as a manifestation of the principles of democracy long awaited by the people. In a country that is ruled by royal decrees and gracious acts, one wonders how, in modern times, Michavellian doctrines have remained as influential as ever, and how those struggling to attain the most basic of rights are driven to despair by those claiming to be patrons of democracy and ethos of modern society. In a country where the ruling clan has expropriated more than 90 percent of its land, coastal lines and natural and reclaimed islands while the vast majority of its inhabitants lack a ceiling over their heads, would it be wrong to assume that the seeds of extremism and terrorism are

planted by these policies?

Last month, the despotic ruler of Bahrain ratified the newest law that is more repressive than any other law within the newly-imposed draconian rules intended to subjugate the people of Bahrain. The Terrorism Law stipulates the death penalty to anyone who questions the legitimacy of the hereditary dictatorship, its imposed constitution and laws or challenge the authority of the present military dictator. This is in addition to the 2002 Al Khalifa constitution, the Societies Law, the Public Gathering Law, the Press Law and Law 56/2002 that gives impunity to the torturers. This is in addition to the political naturalisation process that has resulted in transforming Bahrain into one of the safe havens for potential terrorists who have been naturalised by the Al Khalifa clan. In defiance to public mood, Sheikh Hamad has embarked on the most dangerous of policies adopted by the Al Khalifa since they occupied our country in 1783. More than 100,000 foreigners, mostly from regions known for breeding Al Qa'ida terrorists, have been given Bahraini citizenship. These royal gracious acts are undertaken to alter fundamentally, the population balance for political ends. This is done with the tacit support, and possible encouragement of the US government.

It is our belief that this hereditary dictatorship is a source of instability in the country, and the region. It is wrong to support it or even defend its dictatorial nature and policies. They have provided a fertile environment for the growth of extremism at a time when the world is bogged down in efforts to contain this phenomena. Once again, the US policies in supporting the Israeli aggression and the dictatorial regimes in the Arab world, are proving disastrous. As the human race struggles to achieve stability through representative governments, all efforts must be directed to encourage democracy and resist expansionist and dictatorial rule such as that of Israel and Bahrain. Stability cannot be achieved in the absence of meaningful justice. Without courageous steps in this direction, the region and the world will never enjoy the benefits of stability and democracy.

Bahrain is ruled by despots, thieves and terrorists

Following is a statement distributed to the participants in a one-day whitewashing seminar at the Hilton Hotel in London on 20th July.

Bahrain is a lovely country; its people are wonderful, hospitable and well-hearted. Its biggest problem, however, is that it is ruled by a hereditary dictatorship that rules with a spirit of hatred and vengeance. After a brief lull in its human rights abuses that started in 2001, the situation has worsened dramatically as the Al Khalifa ploys are exposed to the world and the people's power emerged again to challenge their authoritarian rule. Today, there are more than sixty political prisoners who are languishing in torture chambers and mistreated by Al Khalifa's foreign mercenaries.

One of the aims of the regime has been to encourage foreign businesses to the country. Members of the ruling family who plundered the wealth of the people have been desperate to woo back international companies in order to amass more wealth, while the people are exposed to extreme hardship, poverty and unemployment. But the world community has shunned their attempts knowing that the regime's performance record in domestic politics has been extremely poor. Human rights abuses are on the increase, and international human rights organisations, such as Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and others have resumed their interest in Bahrain as the human rights situation worsened. The ruling family has received a major blow when it was accused by a recent US State Department report of human trafficking.

The present prime minister, who has held

his post since 1971, has run an empire of economic corruption unparalleled in the region. In addition to plundering the country's oil wealth, he owns major businesses, hotels, casinos and land. He adopted an economic regime that facilitated corruption, encouraged devious dealings and competed even with small entrepreneurs in snatching government contracts. The ruler has faithfully followed the steps of his predecessors and taken the corruption further. While his uncle (the prime minister expropriated vast areas of land at a time when ordinary citizens cannot afford basic housing) he, and his son (the Crown Prince) have claimed long stretches of coastline, reclaimed areas of the sea and sold parts of them at high prices to cronies, opportunists and foreign millionaires. The aim has been to drive the natives out of their land as they become increasingly unable to lead a decent life.

Corruption is the name of the game in Bahrain. That is why international businesses have refused to work under the laws and practices of the Al Khalifa. As the country became more politically unstable, they moved away, mainly to Dubai and the dream of turning Bahrain into "the Singapore of the Gulf" has evaporated. The corruption starts from the top down, with bribery, expropriation, free visa labour force, blackmailing of local businesses into submission to the orders of the ruling family members, becoming the main features of economic life in the country. The gap between the rich and the poor has widened immensely. While persons working for the ruling family can earn up to US\$30,000 per month, ordi-

nary Bahrainis earn as low as US\$500. This is in a country where land has become so scarce that the price per square foot sells for up to US100. It is a façade of economic boom underneath which the tragic reality is hidden. Oil wealth is being used not to serve the people and their needs but to spread corruption, create false images of openness and political reforms and undermine the rule of law.

Our prisoners of conscience, who are languishing in Al Khalifa torture chambers appeal to you to make a difference. Costly seminars such as the one held at the Hilton Hotel in Park Land, are attempts to whitewash the crimes of this despotic hereditary dictatorship. The situation in Bahrain is exacerbated by the political naturalisation process which has flooded the country with people from areas known to be breeding grounds for fanaticism, extremism and terrorism. Bahrain has been permanently transformed through a mechanical process to become a place of total corruption, a ground for breeding extremism and a country that has been expropriated from its native inhabitants at the hands of occupiers, thieves and torturers.

We are protesting to make people aware of the kind of hereditary dictatorship that employs torture against innocent protesters and buys off cronies and agents to whitewash its real images worldwide. The facts are hidden behind the façade of normality and reforms. Please do not listen to the Al Khalifa's non-sense.

UN expert urges Bahrain to amend terror bill to bring it in line with human rights law

25 July 2006 – An independent United Nations human rights expert today urged Bahrain's Government to amend a new counter-terrorism bill, expressing concern that the law could harm human rights in the country and would be "particularly troubling" as the Kingdom is a member of the newly constituted UN Human Rights Council.

The bill, titled "Protecting Society from Terrorists Acts," is awaiting ratification by the Head of State before becoming law, but the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism, Martin Scheinin, called for the legislative and executive branches to "reconsider."

"While fully conscious of the fact that States' obligation to protect and promote human rights requires them to take effec-

tive measures to combat terrorism, I encourage the executive and legislative branches of Government to make amendments to this bill to bring it in line with international human rights law.

"Disregarding concerns based on international human rights standards would be particularly troubling in the case of a country that is a member of the newly constituted UN Human Rights Council." The Special Rapporteur wrote to the Government in March and again last month, when this bill was before Parliament, identifying some issues of concern regarding the proposed legislation and he also listed these four broad areas in today's statement.

He said he was concerned that:

- the definition of terrorism is overly broad since there is no requirement of specific aim to commit a terrorist act and

some acts are deemed to be "terrorist" without the intention of causing death or serious bodily injury – thus this definition goes against several human rights instruments;

- restrictions on freedom of association and assembly would allow the criminalization of peaceful demonstrations by civil society;

- excessive limitations are being placed on freedom of speech due to the use of broad and vague terms regarding the offence of incitement to terrorism since there is not a clear threshold for criminalization established;

- rights to due process would be denied because of the excessive powers of the Public Prosecutor regarding detention without judicial review.

Mr. Scheinin and other Special Rapporteurs are independent, unpaid experts with a mandate from the Human Rights Council.

Amnesty International: Counter-terrorism bill threatens human rights

Public Statement

Amnesty International is calling on the Bahrain government to reconsider its new counter-terrorism bill. As it stands now, the new bill undermines human rights protection in the country.

The Bill, entitled 'Protecting Society from Terrorist Acts', was approved by both the House of Representatives (Parliament) and the appointed Shura (Consultative) Council on 16 July and 22 July 2006 respectively. It has now been referred to His Majesty Shaikh Hamad bin 'Issa Al Khalifa, the King of Bahrain, for final ratification.

The UN Committee against Torture (CAT) and the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights while countering terrorism have expressed concern that the Bill poses risks to the peaceful exercise of human rights. Amnesty International strongly urges the King to initiate a thorough reconsideration of the new Bill, taking into account the following observations:

The Bill's definition of terrorist crimes is too broad

Amnesty International is concerned that some of the articles of the Bill define terrorism without sufficient precision. This undermines the principle of legality (which requires that criminal law be formulated sufficiently clearly and precisely to allow individuals to know what constitutes a crime) and risks criminalizing the peaceful exercise of the freedoms of expression, assembly and association. Article 1, for example, includes 'threatening national unity' within the prohibited aims of a terrorist act.

As noted on 25 July 2006 by the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights while countering terrorism, the Bill defines terrorism without reference to a specific intention to cause death or serious injury. For example, Article 6 of the Bill makes it a crime to provide accommodation or subsistence to persons who are later convicted of terrorist crimes, without a requirement that the individuals providing accommodation or subsistence to such persons themselves intended to cause death or serious injury or to further terrorist ends.

The Bill restricts freedom of association and assembly

Article 6 fails adequately to define what constitutes a terrorist association or organization and instead implies that any political organization opposed to the Bahraini Constitution is a terrorist body. It also vaguely defines a terrorist organization as one which aims to 'prevent any of the State enterprises or public authorities from exercising their duty' and to 'harm the national unity'. This may place restrictions on the activities of political

opposition and even human rights defenders. While Article 6 provides that those assisting terrorist groups or joining them will only be penalized if they 'knew' of the organizations' terrorist aims, if terrorist aims are not adequately defined, this provision would not offer a sufficient safeguard against politically-motivated trials and unsafe convictions.

The Bill restricts freedom of expression

Article 11 criminalizes the 'promotion' of terrorist acts and the possession of documents containing such promotional material. In light of the broad definition of terrorist acts in the Bill, this provision restricts the right to freedom of expression guaranteed in international law, which includes the freedom to seek, receive and impart information of all kinds. The Bill grants the Public Prosecutor excessive discretion and heightens the risk of torture or ill-treatment, and arbitrary detention

Article 27 allows for extensive detention before charge without judicial review

It only demands that the public prosecutor reviews the detention of any individual held for more than five days if the arresting authorities seek to extend the detention period. This can be for another 10 days. The public prosecutor is not a judicial authority and lacks the requisite independence to be a check against arbitrary detention. Furthermore, Article 28

of the Bill allows the security services to ask for extension of pre-charge detention (as specified in Article 27) on the basis of secret evidence which the detainee has no access to and cannot challenge.

A maximum period of 15 days' detention without judicial review is a violation of the right to liberty and security of the person. It also places the detainee at a heightened risk of torture or ill-treatment.

The issue of the death penalty and other punishments in the Bill

Amnesty International is concerned that the Bill empowers the courts to impose the death penalty and fails to provide essential procedural safeguards for people facing a possible death sentence. The organization believes that the death penalty violates the right to life and is the ultimate cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment.

Furthermore, Amnesty International finds the increases in punishment as stipulated in Article 3 problematic given the broad definition of the offences in the Bill.

As a member of the new Human Rights Council, it is particularly important that the Kingdom of Bahrain uphold the highest standards in the promotion and protection of human rights and reflect these standards in its national legislation. Amnesty International therefore urges the Bahraini authorities to conduct a full review of the counter-terrorism Bill and bring it into line with international human rights law standards.

Death Squads kidnap and torture a citizen, and Al Khalifa revenge against another

On the first anniversary of 7/7 atrocities in London, the Bahrain Freedom Movement has expressed its sorrow and sadness at the continuing circle of violence, terrorism and extremism, and appealed for tolerance, democracy and respect of human rights in the Middle East. Terrorism and extremism, it said, are the product of injustice, wars and dictatorship. It called for an end of occupation in Palestine, Iraq and Afghanistan, fundamental reforms of the political systems in the region, and a firm commitment to democracy and respect of human rights. It also said that regimes such that of the Al Khalifa hereditary dictatorship in Bahrain, are an affront to democratic decency and a threat to the rule of law and civil liberties. Western support of these totalitarian regimes is among the root causes of terrorism and extremism.

In a further act of revenge against political and human rights activists, the Al Khalifa ruling family has committed two serious crimes in recent days. On Saturday 1st July, they instructed one of their

judges to issue a sentence of one year jail against the human rights activist, Abdul Ra'uf Al Shayeb following his peaceful campaigning against their dictatorship in Geneva. Mr Al Shayeb and three other activists had attended the first session of the UN Human Rights Council, presented vivid accounts of the atrocities being committed against the people of Bahrain at the hands of the Al Khalifa occupiers and appealed to the international community to protect the identity and rights of the people of Bahrain from the onslaught of this hereditary dictatorship. Mr Al Shayeb also took part in a demonstration in front of the Bahrain's embassy in London on Tuesday 28th June. Over the past three years, the regime has orchestrated a criminal case against Al Shayeb every time he travelled abroad to campaign against its dictatorship. But non of these fabrications has been proven nor has Mr Al Shayeb changed his course of activism. Character assassination of strong persistent opponents has been fundamental to the Al Khalifa policy, but has not

Wounds of tortured past still open in Bahrain

Christian Chaise, AFP
July 5, 2006

The wounds of a painful past are taking time to heal in Bahrain, where rights advocates want amends for Shia activists abused during the 1990s and the government insists that the chapter is closed. "We want the government to recognize that there were serious crimes of torture," said Sabika Al Najjar, secretary-general of the Bahrain Human Rights Society. "We call for the establishment of a Reconciliation and Truth Commission, like what happened in Morocco and South Africa," she said.

The commission "should listen to people, investigate and document the cases, and rehabilitate and compensate the victims," Najjar said. "Criminals" who confess and 'express their regrets' could avoid prosecution, she added.

A Manama-based diplomat said that while the scale and seriousness of human rights violations in Bahrain are certainly "not comparable" to what happened in South Africa or Morocco, "they are an issue" in the small Gulf kingdom, where they had caused a "deep trauma." The abuses go back to the 25 years following the dissolution of parliament by the then-emir in 1975, chiefly during anti-government unrest that left at least 38 people dead between 1994 and 1999.

The protests were led by the Shia opposition, whose community makes up a majority of the native population in the Sunni-ruled archipelago.

King Hamad sought to turn the page on the past after he took the throne in 1999 - initially as emir, before proclaiming himself monarch when Bahrain became a kingdom ruled by a constitutional monarchy in 2002.

Hamad launched democratic reforms in 2001 that led to the release of political prisoners, the return of exiles, and the legalization of political "associations." The latter serve as de facto political parties, which remain banned.

The exact number of detainees presumed to have been tortured is not known, but Najjar, whose organization is seen as the most credible in the field, said that there were "more than 2,000 cases of torture, most of them from the 1990s" - a not negligible number in a native population of around 450,000.

As it has been doing over the past five years, the Bahrain Human Rights Society this year marked the "United Nations International Day in Support of Victims of Torture," commemorated around the world on June 26, with an exhibit of drawings.

Najjar recalled the first time that the day was marked in Bahrain five years ago, during a short-lived honeymoon between the monarch and the opposition. "When we celebrated June 26 for the first time in 2001, the king had a speech read by someone [on his behalf]. When we saw that, we had high hopes," she recounted. "We met the king several times and told him about the [proposed] commission ... We gave him documents. It



was a long time ago," Najjar said. In October 2002 King Hamad issued a decree, known as "Decree 56," stipulating that courts could no longer hear cases brought against individuals accused of crimes committed before a general amnesty declared in February 2001 as part of national reconciliation and political reform.

Since then there has been deadlock. In 2003 a petition signed by more than 33,000 people demanding the repeal of Decree 56 was handed to the Royal Court but got no response.

There have also been several demonstrations over the years to press demands that officials accused of practicing torture during the anti-government disturbances be put on trial.

"The chapter is closed ... The amnesty should be for everybody," information minister Mohammed Abdel Ghaffar said. "This is a new page. We don't want to go back to the past. The past is gone. Period."

Any possible compromise appears to be made more difficult by the fact that the National Committee for Martyrs and Victims of Torture, a body created by torture victims and relatives that is believed to be very close to the opposition, is demanding that all former torturers - some of whom could still be in government jobs - be prosecuted and jailed.

"It's a demand by the victims themselves," said Abdel Hadi Al Khawaja, a Shia human rights activist close to the committee. "The wounds are open. We need to close them," he said.

Khawaja admitted, however, that things had changed since 2001 and that "there is no more systematic torture" in Bahrain.

"The king is very serious about the image of the country," he said, noting that Bahrain won a seat on the new UN Human Rights Council in May.

Death Squads kidnap and torture citizens, *Continued from P 3*

really worked. For the past 27 years, Mr Al Shayeb has been imprisoned many times. In the period 1979-2006, Al Shayeb spent a good part of his life in torture chambers, but his will has not been broken by the Al Khalifa torturers.

In line with this policy, Sheikh Hamad's death squad have, this week, kidnapped one citizen, tortured him until he lost consciousness. On Wednesday, 5th July, Abbas Abd Ali, from the district of Ekr in Sitra, was taken by seven hooded men, belonging to Sheikh Hamad's death squad, notorious for their cruelty and trained to inflict maximum damage on unwanted people. He was beaten on all parts of his body until he lost consciousness. He was then taken to hospital where he was treated for severe wounds. The

victim is the brother of Musa Abd Ali who has been in jail since 10th March and who had been kidnapped by death squads last year, tortured and sexually assaulted. His latest arrest came after he took part in a peaceful demonstration at Al Dana Mall in Manama. There are more than 60 prisoners of conscience languishing in Al Khalifa torture chambers.

The Agence France Presse (AFP) on Wednesday wired published a lengthy report about the continuing pain of the victims of the Al Khalifa torture in the past thirty years. The report said: @The wounds of a painful past are taking time to heal in Bahrain, where rights advocates want amends for Shia activists abused during the 1990s and the government insists that the chapter is closed. "We want

the government to recognize that there were serious crimes of torture," said Sabika Al Najjar, secretary-general of the Bahrain Human Rights Society. "We call for the establishment of a Reconciliation and Truth Commission, like what happened in Morocco and South Africa," she said." It detailed the feelings of the victims and highlighted the efforts of human rights activists who seek to safeguard their rights and bring torturers to justice. The report also referred to the 2003 petition, addressed to Sheikh Hamad and signed by more than 33,000 people calling for an amendment to his notorious Law 56 which offered immunity to torturers, especially those from within the Al Khalifa family, such as Abdul Aziz Atiyyat Allah Al Khalifa and the former minister of the interior, Mohammad bin Khalifa Al Khalifa.