

BAHRAIN

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

Bahrain's people need international support in their war of survival

It is a virtual war in Bahrain. It may be undeclared but it is there, waged by the regime and felt by the people in almost every walk of life. It is difficult to see a way out of it as long as the present political management remains in place. The rulers have chosen an all-out war of annihilation against the native Baharna inhabitants and are adopting policies that could only be interpreted to be part of that war. They are channelling the country's resources to the war efforts to ensure a total domination of the scene. This may appear a gross exaggeration, but here are the indicators.

First came the political declaration that there did not exist a partner in the political process. That declaration was made on 14th February 2002 when Sheikh Hamad imposed his tailor-made constitution and declared himself a king. That was in violation of the spirit and letter of the only legal and legitimate document embodied in the 1973 constitution written jointly by the people and the ruling family in the wake of the British withdrawal in 1971. The repeal of that constitution was a clear message from this dictator that the ruling family was the sole power in the country and that the people had no right to share power or express opinion with regards to the management of the country.

Then came the demographic change. That was the single most effective way to annihilate the native population. Tens of thousands of foreigners, mainly from regions known to breed extremism and religious fanaticism such as Syria, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Yemen and Pakistan. Bahraini nationality was granted en-mass to those whose loyalty was assumed to be guaranteed. Despite the calls to halt the process of political naturalisation, the ruling family is pressing ahead with that process in violation of the basic rights of indigenous people. Policies of silencing disenchanted voices included containment, cooption and bribery alongside severe punishment who did not conform. Queues of foreigners at passport and nationality directorate have become a familiar scene in the Manama. Social problems arising from cultural clashes have also become a phenomena. The aim of the ruling family is to

alter the demographic balance in its favour. For decades the regime has been described as a minority rule, and any move towards democracy was hindered by the fact that the ruling family feared the majority population. It is now clear that the Al Khalifa rulers have been assured by friendly governments especially those of the US, UK and Saudi Arabia of support in this crime which has become a serious threat to the national fabric as well as the culture and traditions of the Bahraini society with its Shia and Sunni compatriots.

Thirdly, the war being waged by the regime became clearer following the publication last year of the Al Bandar report which confirmed the long-held suspicion that the Al Khalifa was conducting clandestine operations against the natives. The report uncovered a secret web created and run directly by the minister of the royal court, Khalid bin Ahmad Al Khalifa, a notorious sectarian figure, hated by Bahrainis. He works under the direct orders of the ruler, Sheikh Hamad.

The web is headed by Ahmad Atiyyat Allah Al Khalifa, the brother of the notorious torturer, Abdul Aziz Atiyyat Allah Al Khalifa. It is a well-organised criminal net that aims to fundamentally change the social, economic, cultural and religious balance in the country. Its members include journalists, religious scholars, spies and mercenaries. The ruler has refused any request to investigate its criminal activities. When some members of Sheikh Hamad's shura council requested to question Atiyyat Allah, the request was flatly refused. The ruler is sheltering the web and its criminal activities in a show of defiance to the public anger and frustration. Calls have been made to the international community to intervene in order to stop these criminal activities before the country erupts in social and political mayhem.

Fourthly, in addition to the secret web, other pseudo-secretive webs are now in full swing, funded by the royal court and directed to confront political activists and opponents. A media web has

been running the media show, spreading into newspapers and magazines and meddling in the electronic sites. Even the most outspoken of these sites have been infiltrated by paid "writers" to create confusion and doubts in the minds of the people, and undermine the credibility of any anti-regime activity. A new group calling itself "illa al watan" is the latest among these networks.

Perhaps the most violent of these groups are the death squads, created and run by the royal court. This was the first to be created in the nineties by Sheikh Hamad. It has been in operation ever since. The first victim was Nooh Khalil Al Nooh who was kidnapped, tortured and killed in 1998. His mutilated body was thrown at the steps of his house. Despite inquiries from the British Foreign Office, no one was arrested. Other victims were subsequently murdered by these death squads including Mohammad Juma Al Shakhouri (2001), Mahdi Abdul Rahman (2006) and Abbas Al Shakhouri this year. Scores others were tortured or beaten in the streets by these death squads. They are used to shield the Al Khalifa from public anger, exact severe punishments on activists and create fear among the public.

This war is set to continue unabated as long as the international community remains silent and indifferent to the situation in Bahrain. It is a war of existence to both parties. The natives have never before called for the removal of the Al Khalifa. It is the ruling family that has boldly been engaged in a war of annihilation against them. Sheikh Hamad has been advised by individuals, groups and governments to take steps to change the status of his family into what would appear a majority rule. This is being done in the most ruthless way, and the people of Bahrain are paying the price.

The people have been with no alternative but to continue their struggle. In the past they were endeavouring to achieve their rights. They are now attempting to defend their existence in the face of the onslaught by the regime. To them, it is a game of survival. To succeed they need the help and support of the international community. Will they be given that support?

Protests against premier's crimes and ruler's genocide

Death squads were in action last night to attack the peaceful demonstrators in Sanabis town. Scores of young people went out to the streets to protest against the prime minister who represents the ultimate evil to the people of Bahrain. Demonstrators flocked to the streets to express their opinion but were attacked by the death squads and riot police who employed harsh tactics including tear gas. The area was cordoned off and running battles were fought with those mercenaries. The battles continued unabated as the people gathered strength to fight off the aggression of those mercenaries.

Sheikh Khalifa bin Salman Al Khalifa is the longest serving prime minister in the world whose tenure has been marked with state terror, corruption and despotism. In a country where the people have no power to change their government, Sheikh Khalifa has remained in his post through the adoption of heavy-handed policies, intimidation and absolute dictatorship. In recent months he bribed one of the United Nations agencies into granting him an award for good achievement. It later transpired that, one month earlier, he had bribed the agency with one million dollars. The use of public funds to bribe groups and individuals has been a policy for the past three decades. Guests to the Al Khalifa dictators were often given Rolex watches and other jew-

ellery items. Paid holidays for parliamentarians, journalists and employees of prominent organisations have also been granted. A glance at the British MPs register would clearly reveal how some members had been bought off by the Al Khalifa dictatorship in return for their services that include positive imaging of the regime.

In another development the unemployed youth organised a picket of the ministry of labour to demand job opportunities and regular unemployment benefits. They asked to meet the minister who, for unknown reasons, refused to meet them. An emissary from the ministry asked them to disperse after informing them that other officials would not be meeting them. The unemployed then raised anti-government slogans and remained steadfast in their positions.

A prominent veteran opposition figure is being hospitalised after suffering a blackout and exhaustion. Sheikh Mohammad Ali Al Ekri, 78, was taken to the emergency department at Salmaniya hospital where he is now receiving treatment. Sheik Al Ekri has suffered physically at the hands of the regime during his repeated detention periods. He was first arrested in September 1979 upon his return to Bahrain from abroad. He remained in torture chambers for 50 months under the State Security Law imposed in 1974

by the British colonial officer, Ian Henderson. His case was highlighted by The Times on 11th January 1983 under the Prisoners of Conscience column. He was released in December 1983. He was repeatedly persecuted for his relentless activism against the regime. Sheikh Al Ekri has championed the causes of other prisoners of conscience and attended the show trials of many activists. He is a legendary figure with immense drive for action, a clear conscience and a pure soul. The people have been praying for his speedy recovery.

On the International Day of Indigenous Peoples, the native people of Bahrain have appealed to the world for a speedy intervention to stop the Al Khalifa regimes from completing their programmed of ethnic genocide against them. Since the present ruler came to power in 1999, he has embarked on a naturalisation programme aimed at changing the demographic balance in the country against the native majority. Tens of thousands of foreigners have been granted Bahraini nationality, many of them had never visited the country. The local press have been directed not to discuss this issue. The United Nations declared the decade 1994-2004 the International Decade of the Worlds' Indigenous Peoples. The International Day of Indigenous Peoples is 9 August every year.

Bahrain: Take action to protect human rights defender Nabeel Ahmed Rajab

Since 1 July 2007, human rights defender and Vice-President of the Bahrain Centre for Human Rights (BCHR), Nabeel Ahmed Rajab has faced ongoing harassment and has been followed by civilian vehicles on a daily basis to and from his home. Urge the authorities in Bahrain to conduct an inquiry into the source of the intimidation with a view to identifying those responsible and bringing them to justice.

Take Action

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Target addreses:

H.M Sheikh Hamad Bin Isa Al Khalifa,
Your Excellency,

I would like to express my concern in relation to the ongoing harassment of human rights defender and Vice-President of the Bahrain Centre for Human Rights (BCHR), Nabeel Ahmed Rajab, since 1 July 2007. The BCHR is a

non-governmental organisation which works to defend civil, political, economic and social rights in Bahrain.

Since 1 July 2007, Nabeel Rajab has reportedly been the subject of ongoing harassment and has been followed by civilian vehicles on a daily basis to and from his home. In 2005, he had been the target of a smear campaign from an anonymous source in which family members, friends, business associates and Government officials received letters and telephone text messages accusing him of being a "spy" and of committing "acts of treason".

On 19 July 2005, Nabeel Ahmed Rajab was beaten by police officers whilst attending a peaceful demonstration in solidarity with the Committee for the Unemployed. He suffered a broken finger, a fractured arm and a head injury as a result of the attack. More recently, in October 2006, he was summoned by the Public Prosecutor's Office for questioning in relation to BCHR's referral to the 'Bandargate Scandal' on its website.

The 'Bandargate' scandal refers to the case of Dr Salah Al-Bandar, a former advisor to the Ministry of Cabinet Affairs in Bahrain, who was reportedly charged, in absentia, with seizing government papers for a report he had issued, in which he accused the government of conspiring to

marginalize the majority Shia community and attempting to rig the forthcoming parliamentary elections. Reports claim that to date none of the government officials named in the report have been investigated and the government has made no official statement on the allegations.

I am deeply concerned that the ongoing intimidation and harassment of Nabeel Ahmed Rajab is intended to discourage him from carrying out his legitimate peaceful activities in defence of human rights in Bahrain, in particular the rights of freedom of expression and opinion, freedom of assembly and freedom of association.

I urge the authorities in Bahrain to:

1. Conduct a prompt and impartial inquiry into the source of the threats and other forms of intimidation directed towards Nabeel Ahmed Rajab, with a view to identifying those parties responsible and bringing them to justice;
2. Adopt measures to ensure the physical and psychological integrity of Nabeel Ahmed Rajab and his family;
3. Ensure that Nabeel Ahmed Rajab and other human rights defenders in Bahrain, including members of the Bahrain Centre for Human Rights, are free to carry out their activities in the promotion and protection of human rights without fear of intimidation or reprisals.

August 2007

Front Line is concerned about the ongoing persecution of human rights defenders in Bahrain.

Despite provisions for basic rights in Bahraini law and its adherence to a number of international human rights treaties, in practice these rights are substantially limited. Human rights defenders in Bahrain continue to face high levels of insecurity and are victim to various forms of repression, such as arbitrary arrest, judicial proceedings based on false or unfounded charges of "encouraging hatred of the state and distributing falsehoods and rumours", threats, physical assaults, illtreatment, torture and numerous other acts of harassment by the authorities and government security forces.

Attacks on Human Rights Defenders

Since 2005, Nabeel Rajab, the Vice-President of the Bahrain Centre for Human Rights (BCHR), has been the subject of ongoing harassment. As of 1 July 2007, Nabeel has been followed by individuals travelling in civilian vehicles to and from his home. In 2005, Nabeel and his wife Somaya were the target of a smear campaign from an anonymous source. This campaign has been linked to secret network of government officials and other people close to the government and is allegedly headed by a member of the royal family.

Nabeel Rajab's case has been presented to the public prosecutor, but as yet no action has been taken. On 19 July 2005, Nabeel was physically assaulted by police officers while attending a demonstration. In October 2006, he was summoned by the Public Prosecutor's Office for questioning in relation to BCHR's article on the 'Bandargate Scandal' on its website.

Abdulahadi Al-khawaja, the Chairperson of the BCHR, Hassan Mushaima, Secretary General of HAQ Movement and Sahker Abdul-Aal, member of the Unemployed Committee, were targeted in February 2007. Security forces surrounded the neighbourhoods where they lived and masked security personnel forcibly entered their homes with arrest warrants issued at the request of the Public Prosecutor. The three human rights defenders were then



Human Rights defenders at risk in Bahrain

taken to the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) and after 7 hours of detention including interrogation by both the CID and members of the Public Prosecution, they were released on bail. The charges against them related

to "state security crimes" including: the intention to change the governing system of the country, circulating false information, insulting the King and inciting hatred against the regime in accordance to articles 160, 165, 168, 172, 173 & 214 of the 1976 Bahraini Penal Code. If convicted, they faced a maximum sentence of 10 years imprisonment. The human rights defenders were released following demonstrations in several different parts of the country. Their trial was due to take place on 21 May 2007, however it was postponed by order of the King of Bahrain.

Abdulahadi Al-khawaja has been arrested and detained on four occasions. In 2004 he was detained for two months, for having allegedly referred to the Prime Minister as corrupt in a public seminar on poverty. He was sentenced to one year imprisonment but later released. He has been subjected to severe beatings by the Special Security Forces on a number of occasions. None of these incidents have been allegedly investigated by the authorities.

Ghada Jamsheer, President of the Women's Petition Committee has repeatedly faced fabricated legal charges including "insulting the judiciary" as a result of her work on the rights of women in Bahrain's family courts. In 2007, Ghada Jamsheer has been victim of anonymous threats and harassment by phone calls and SMS messages. She has been followed by security police cars.

Freedom of assembly and peaceful gathering

Bahraini law prohibits unauthorised public gatherings of more than five persons and public gatherings need to be notified to the Ministry of Interior twenty four hours prior. Front Line has received a number of reports of the use of excessive force by security forces when dispersing demonstrations. Amendments to the 1973 Law on Public Gatherings and Processions that were signed into law by the King on 20 July 2006 further increased the number of legislative constraints.

According to these amendments, demonstrations organised in public places close to "sensitive" places are strictly prohibited; any public meeting or demonstration has to be notified to the head of Public Security at least three days in ad-

vance; organisers and participants of prohibited demonstrations face prison sentences of up to six months and/or a minimum fine of 100 dinars (200 euros). Since these amendments came into force, many demonstrations including those organised by human rights activists have been violently repressed by police authorities.

Freedom of association

New legislation, under the guise of counter-terrorism, has contributed to further infringements of the freedom of association. The Societies Law no. 21 of 1989 requires that all societies and organisations be registered, prohibiting any activity by an unlicensed society. The Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs is reported to hold strong discretionary powers in these matters and the authority to reject the registration of any organisation deemed to be against the interest of state security. The Ministry also has the right to appoint management of the societies and to close down any society temporarily. This legislation is designed to prevent the creation of independent

organisations and impede the existing ones from carrying out their activities successfully. On 29 September 2004, the Labour and Social Affairs Minister Majid al-Alawi decided to close the Bahrain Centre for Human Rights (BCHR) because of "activities contravening the Societies Law of 1989". The order prohibits members of the BCHR from resuming activities and freezes all funds.

In May 2007, the Women's Petition Committee, the Unemployed committee, the Bahrain Youth Human Rights Association and other non-registered human rights organizations received official letters from the ministry of Social Development to halt activities or face legal persecution. The same was stated by the ministry in the local press.

The Bill on 'Protecting Society from Terrorist Acts', which was signed into law by the King on 14 August 2006, is likely to intensify acts of repression. This law has been criticised by Bahraini civil society and international organisations, because it can be used to prevent civil society to associate and human rights defenders to operate free of all restrictions. Article 1 describes a terrorist act as one that threatens national unity and without any further articulation on what this means, the vagueness of these provisions paves the way for criminalisation of the activities of human rights defenders. The United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights while Countering Terrorism had publicly urged the King to seek amendments to the Bill passed by the legislature, expressing concern that it contained an excessively broad definition of terrorism and terrorist acts.

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Lord Avebury: Transgression in the political programme

Bahrain seminar August 23, 2007

We meet again to review the situation in Bahrain, as we do twice a year, and this time our theme is the continuing political impasse. We have a distinguished panel of experts to give you their views, and I will take just a few minutes of your time before I introduce them.

As we have noted before, the al-Khalifa family remain firmly in control of the land and wealth of the state; the people have no power to change the government, and the constitution handed down from on high by the ruler, which was substituted for a scheme approved in a referendum, has proved to be a dead end. The ruler, though acknowledging that democracy means continuous change in consultation with the people, has no programme of reform, and no intention of engaging in dialogue with all sections of society including the poor, the victims of torture, and human rights activists.

Just a few weeks ago, the British citizen who was in charge of the security apparatus during the previous ruler's time, came here for medical treatment, after obtaining as assurance that he wouldn't be arrested or questioned while here for the many acts of torture said to have been committed. We do understand the difficulty of collecting evidence that will allow Mr Henderson to be prosecuted with a reasonable likelihood of obtaining a conviction, but there are 14 victims ready to testify to their own sufferings, to say nothing of the bereaved families of those who died under torture: I wrote to the Foreign Office about many of these victims at the time: in 1995, for instance, Husein Qambar died under torture on January 4, Hamid Qasim, age 17 on or before March 26 when the police delivered his mutilated body to the family. The person who took the photographs of Hamid's body in the morgue had to remain anonymous for his own safety. Our Embassy in Manama, to whom I sent a copy of a photograph taken by the family, said they believed his injuries may have been caused by rubber bullets, but I have never heard of rubber bullets severing a person's fingers. Another boy who died under torture that year was Saeed Abdul Rasool al-Eskafy age 16, whose mutilated body was handed back to his family on July 8. These and many other cases were reported to Ministers at the time, together with the allegation that Mr Henderson, knew about the atrocities happening under his command as everyone else did in Bahrain.

The present regime may not be responsible for the heinous tortures committed towards the end of the last century, but Henderson is an honoured resident of Manama and until recently appeared on great occasions there. Not only has there been no attempt

to bring him and his lieutenant Adel Flaifel to justice in Bahrain, but all those who were involved in the torture apparatus have been given an indemnity from prosecution. Bahrain signed up to the Convention against Torture but made sure that its own torturers would escape justice, violating the Convention before the ink was dry on their signature.

Granted, these days the persecution of dissidents, trade unionists and human rights activists is not so extreme, but those who speak out about the grievances of the people are still targeted for violent acts and threats. Nabil Rajab, head of the Centre for Human Rights, was deliberately attacked by the police along with a few others last month when he was about to participate in a march for the unemployed. The police knew who he was, and picked on him, kicking and beating him so that he had to be taken to hospital with back injuries. In June, Human Rights Watch protested to the ruler about the injuries inflicted by the police on two men arrested at a peaceful demonstration. One suffered trauma to his face and head, the other a broken jaw among other injuries after being severely beaten up. At the end of July the BBC's Crossing Continents programme reported from Bahrain on further demonstrations being attacked by riot police with tear gas, truncheons and rubber bullets.

Some of the causes of the frustration and discontent were identified by the BBC. In spite of the enormous wealth generated by Bahrain's oil, the villages inhabited by the Shi'a majority are painfully down at heel and a high proportion of their inhabitants are unemployed, contrasting sharply with the luxury palaces of the Sunni elite. And some of the poor villagers who lived along the coast have been dispossessed of even what they had, as the ruling family seize land on the coast for new development or private marinas. In a rare concession, the ruler, now in London cabled an order yesterday to his cousin Sheik Hamad bin Mohammed Salman al-Khalifa to dismantle a concrete wall he had built two years ago blocking access to the coastline and installed a series of nets to prevent fishing in nearby waters, provoking demonstrations by the villagers of al-Malkiyah, some 12 kilometers (7 miles) west of the capital Manama. But in law, the whole of the coast belongs to the ruler, and the al-Khalifas are generating huge profits for themselves by reclaiming shallow waters for development. This money doesn't appear in the state accounts, and questions are never asked about it in the tame parliament. Nor do they inquire about the huge sums appropriated from oil and gas revenues. The Economist Intelligence Unit says that Bahrain's output of refined products is

270,000 barrels a day. At an average price of \$60 a barrel, not counting the added value of refining, this comes to nearly \$6 billion. Add to that the profits from the aluminium smelter, Bahrain Telecoms, central bank profits and revenues of other public assets, and the income dwarfs the average budgeted expenditure of the state of \$4.9 billion. A few billions have to be siphoned off to fund the royal courts and other unreported extra-budgetary expenses, such as the coastal developments which could be seen on Google Earth until the local ISP blocked the images of palaces, and the island of Jiddah, formerly a prison but now developed as a private holiday estate of the Prime Minister.

Last year also Bahrain expelled a British citizen, Dr Salah al-Bandar, who blew the whistle on a huge machine of corruption and illegality run by Sheikh Attiyatallah al-Khalifa, the head of the Central Intelligence Organisation. Dr al-Bandar presented his report to the ruler and other members of the government, but their response was to vilify him and falsely charge him with serious offences, without responding to any of the detailed evidence he presented.

Bahrain seldom makes the headlines in Britain, and when it does get into the news, it is as a valued ally and a pillar of stability in the Gulf region. If the UK really wants to foster a long term relationship with Bahrain, we must be more active in defending the rights of democrats and victims of al-Khalifa repression. The future lies with the people, and not with the kleptocrats who rule Bahrain today.

Front Line Report *Cont from P3*

Freedom of expression

The Constitution provides for the freedom of speech and freedom of the press, albeit with certain restrictions. In practice, these rights are limited in particular in relation to the media. The Press Law (47/2002) contains measures that unduly restrict press freedoms, such as prohibitions on insulting the King and on reports that "threaten national unity." Journalists exercise a considerable degree of self-censorship, particularly on issues such as corruption implicating the ruling family. The Bahraini authorities continued to severely ban all statements and press releases issued by organisations denouncing human rights violations in the country. As such, the websites of about twenty civil society organisations, including the BCHR, have been or remain inaccessible in the country.

