

# BAHRAIN

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

## Bahrain's regime guilty of two major crimes against humanity

As the time approaches for the trial of the ruling family at the United Nations Human Rights Council for its gross violations of human rights, questions are being asked about other areas where crimes against humanity have been or are being carried out against the natives of Bahrain. The forthcoming trial will undoubtedly deal with the rules and laws governing the human rights conduct of the ruling family, including the notorious Law 56/2002. That law was imposed by Sheikh Hamad to guarantee the impunity of criminals like Adel Flaifel, Ian Henderson, Abdul Aziz Atiyyat Allah Al Khalifa and many others. It was decreed after Flaifel who had been threatened with legal action by the Australian authorities after his victims filed a lawsuit for his arrest and trial. He threatened the Al Khalifa that he would expose senior members of the ruling family if he were to be tried. He agreed to return to Bahrain only after he was guaranteed impunity. The notorious Law 56 was thus decreed by Sheikh Hamad, in contradiction to the articles of the Convention Against Torture (CAT) that Bahrain had signed in 1998. Victims of torture have been denied access to local judiciary which had thrown out cases brought against torturers. Torturers have either been promoted or granted financial rewards for their past inhumane treatment of Bahraini prisoners. Thus, while Sheikh Hamad and his entourage have been trying to portray their regime as breaking with the ugly past, none of their policies have reflected real repentance and reform. Today, the people of Bahrain are facing a different and potentially more serious crime; that of genocide. The native Shia Muslims have been subjected not only to political marginalization, but also to human catastrophe. Ever since Sheikh Hamad became ruler following the death of his father in 1999, he has been engaged in a policy of demographic engineering that aims at fundamentally altering the demographic balance in the country. It started by granting Bahraini citizenship to foreigners selected on ethnic, religious and sectarian basis. The programme has now developed to include displacing the natives through various means. For exam-

ple, they are excluded from employment and denied job opportunities as a matter of policy. They are then urged to seek employment in neighbouring countries such as Qatar, the Emirates of Kuwait. They would receive better pay in addition to reasonable accommodation. In Bahrain, however, it has now become almost impossible to get a house after the ruling family opened the land for other Gulf businessmen to acquire land in an already shrinking market in Bahrain. The result has been a sharp increase in land prices that made them beyond the reach of ordinary Bahrainis. The scene has thus been prepared for a gradual displacement of the local populace to other countries. At the same time, the newly "naturalized" Bahrainis have been adopted as natural citizens, offered good job opportunities and granted citizenship. The result is that the natives are becoming a dwindling commodity, while non-Bahrainis are coming in their tens of thousands to replace them. To the Al Khalifa, the new Bahrainis are more loyal as they owe their privileged position to Sheikh Hamad and his clique. Who is doing this? Whose duty is it to implement this central policy? The Al Bandar Report had produced material evidence to confirm that Sheikh Hamad has two indispensable henchmen. First, Ahmad Atiyyat Allah Al Khalifa, the brother of the notorious torturer, Abdul Azia, had been entrusted with seeing through the political naturalization programme in addition to other duties such as maintaining a dangerous standoff between the Shia and Sunni population and fomenting sectarian strife as much as possible. Some members of the elected half of Sheikh Hamad's shura council have recently filed questions to Ahmad Atiyyat Allah Al Khalifa who hold two ministerial posts. They were prevented by another henchman, Khalifa Al Dhah-rani, from pursuing the questioning of Atiyyat Allah. It was yet another stage in the political game whose directions are not clearly defined. It is now clear that this man has become a liability and time has come to relieve him of his prominent duties especially that relating to the

demographic change. He may soon go, but he will not be prosecuted for overseeing the genocidal policies against the natives. The Flaifel saga is thus repeated with the hope that both would have served the top leadership of the Al Khalifa without being questioned by anyone about what they had done. Ahmad Atiyyat Allah will soon join his brother, in the wilderness after their continued service alongside other members of the Al Khalifa has become a liability. The opposition is thus in an awkward position. They cannot proceed forward as long as the regime maintains its grips over the affairs of the country, and adopts the policy of coercion, cooption or containment to woo some protagonists. At the same time, the pressure from the masses is mounting for a showdown with the Al Khalifa rulers who have shown increasing frustration and fear. They may have sensed that their continued presence in Bahrain has become unpleasant and untenable. It is a dilemma often experienced by peaceful and civilized opposition groups which face totalitarian regimes. The problem become compounded those regimes can lay their hands on large reservoirs of oil money as is the case of Bahrain. The foreign labour force in the country has in recent weeks taken strong actions against the continued maltreatment of foreign workers. This could prove to be detrimental to the security and stability of the country. It is a welcome news that may convince leading figures within the ruling Al Khalifa family that it would be futile to continue the policies of torture, arbitrary detention, and above all, the genocidal approach against the natives of Bahrain. With the rising tension in the country, the regime will feel the pressure for change, and if it does not take real action it may be swept away by the powers for change. It is a gamble, but isn't the Al Khalifa dictatorship one of the worst forms of such unspoken reality? Time may have finally caught up with this severe form of dictatorship at a time when people are turning to democracy and abandoning authoritarian regimes. There is a widespread feeling among people that the change is a must, and will happen.

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## Torture, ethnic cleansing and strikes by migrant workers

The Washington-based Human Rights Watch has called on the ruling family of Bahrain to investigate claims of maltreatment of political detainees including torture and sexual assault. The detained activists were among dozens arrested following clashes between protesters and security forces in and around the capital, Manama, in December. In one incident, protesters set fire to a police vehicle. Several detainees now face charges including possession of weapons allegedly stolen from the vehicle. In January, relatives of detainees – and also men who had been detained in connection with the clashes and then released – said that interrogators had tortured several detainees and sexually assaulted at least one. “The silence of Bahraini authorities in the face of multiple complaints of detainee abuse casts doubt on their commitment to the rule of law,” said Joe Stork, Middle East and North Africa director at Human Rights Watch. “Bahrain should immediately allow independent physicians to examine detainees who are alleging abuse.”

Relatives of Mohammad Singace and of two other detainees, Naji al-Fateel and Hasan Abdelnabi, told Human Rights Watch that these detainees had reported being placed in cells with prisoners suffering from contagious diseases. Relatives of Naji al-Fateel and Hasan Abdelnabi said that these two detainees had recounted, during a family visit on February 11, that guards had beaten them when they protested after hearing Sin-

gace scream from a nearby cell.

As the public anger at the widespread use of torture against political prisoners, demonstrations have continued in several villages over the past few weeks. A grouping of leading opposition figures has called for a demonstration on Friday to protest against the continued detention of the innocent Bahrainis and to demand an impartial investigations into reports of widespread torture. The demonstrators will also call for an independent inquiry into the killing of the latest martyr, Ali Jassim, who was brutally murdered on 17<sup>th</sup> December by the Al Khalifa’s death squads.

This public anger is compounded by the persistent news that more of Saddam’s henchmen have been granted Bahraini citizenship. According to these reports, more than 2000 former Ba’thists have been brought into the country, granted citizenship, assigned to jobs and given adequate accommodation. Most of them have been attached to security and military services, including the notorious Death Squads, which are run by Khalid ibn Ahmad Al Khalifa, the minister of the ruler’s office. This man is also in charge of the programme of the ethnic cleansing that is being implemented at a wide scale. Sheikh Hamad has hitherto refused to allow independent investigation into the role he has played in fomenting sectarian strife in the country.

In order to facilitate the ethnic cleansing programme, the Al Khalifa have adopted new policies denying the natives neces-

sary accommodation. The ministry of housing has recently introduced new rules that virtually exclude the vast majority of Bahrainis. These rules have set standards of income to eliminate many Bahrainis from the right for proper housing. New conditions attached to the granting of governmental housing will make it almost impossible for those with genuine need to be eligible for housing.

Meanwhile, another serious development has shaken the public sector. Many foreign workers, mainly from the Indian Subcontinent, have begun a series of strikes against their degrading treatment that are contrary to the standards devised by the International Labour Organisation (ILO). Most of those migrant workers from South Asian countries, are forced to live in overcrowded lodgings with meagre washing facilities and with no permanent job contracts. They are forced to accept wages much lower than the standards set by ILO, and many of them work long hours. No medical facilities are provided to foreign workers except on minimum level. The strikes have taken place at several places, including Durrat Al Bahrain, a construction project owned by the Al Khalifa and paid for from the national budget. It is expected that more strikes will take place as the living conditions of these migrant workers continue to deteriorate. In certain cases, up to 14 people share one room, with salaries as low as 60 BD (160 US Dollar).

Bahrain Freedom Movement  
19<sup>th</sup> March 2008

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## Fiasco at the show trial of the victims of torture, more protests planned

The show “trial” of the prisoners of conscience has descended into chaos and confusion as it turned into a trial of the ruling family who is accused of a long list of crimes against the people of Bahrain. The accused are 15 innocent young men, whose main crime is expressing their anti-regime opinion during a protest last December against killing a Bahraini young man, Ali Jassim. He was brutally murdered by the death squads under the command of Khalifa bin Ahmad Al Khalifa, the minister of Sheikh Hamad’s royal court. Instead of bringing his killers to justice, Sheikh Hamad and his clique decided to divert the attention away from the real criminals, arresting scores of young men who had embarrassed the Al Khalifa ruling hereditary dictatorship for its role in the killing. After many statements by international and domestic human rights bodies, the ruling family was forced to announce a show trial.

When the “defendants” were brought to the “court” room on Sunday 3<sup>rd</sup> February, their families gathered outside, de-

manding that they be allowed in the court room and talk to their children. It was a chaotic scene as the detained victims became the masters of the show, exposing to the media their wounds that demonstrated beyond any doubt the systematic use of torture as a routine treatment of prisoners. It was an emotional scene that embarrassed the “judges” in front of the journalists and some human rights observers. The show threatened to become a public trial of the Al Khalifa criminals who had tortured the youth with no mercy or compassion.

The main charge against many of the victims is confiscation of arms from the police, a charge that could not hold under legal scrutiny. According to a senior international lawyer, who preferred to speak on condition of anonymity, it was a crime by the regime to send armed police to peaceful protests. It was not a case where national security was under threat. Police are, in democratic civilised countries, are usually unarmed. The question must be put to the ruling family; why is it confronting peaceful protests with arms? This

only confirms the long-held charge that the ruling family considers itself at war with the people of Bahrain. The protesters were targeted by the armed police, and one of them lost his life, while others were injured. This is the true crime whose perpetrators must be held accountable for their crimes.

The fifteen defendants are: Maitham Jassim Al Sheikh, 31 from Jidhafs, member of the Committee of the Unemployed, Isa Abdullah Isa Al Sarh, 25, from Bani Jamra, an activist with the Islamic Action Society, Naji Ali Hassan Fatil, 31, from Bani Jamra, member of the Committee of the Unemployed, Mohammad Abdull Al Singace, 40, President of the Committee Against High Prices, Hassan Abdul Nabi Hassan, 26, from Sitra, member of the Committee of the Unemployed, Ali Ahmad Abdul Aziz Al Madhi, 24, from Hajar town, Hussain Abdul Hassan Al Khatam, 23, from Karzakkan, Ahmad Jaffar Mohammad Ali, 28, from Jidhafs, former member of the Committee of the Unemployed, Hussain Jaffar Turaif, 20,

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## Torture is the order of the day in Hamad's kingdom

### *Activists spell out Torture agony during first court session*

At about 2pm local time (11am GMT) on 24th February, the judge of the High Criminal Court Shaikh Mohamed Al-Khalifa, a member of the ruling family, resided over his chair to declare the start of the first court session for the 15 detainees who have been arrested and exposed to all forms of torture for over two months.

The judge call for the names of all of the 15 detainees, recited the charges prepared by the Public Prosecution and asked of the accusation against them. They all denied the charges, but prior to spell their innocence, they briefly explained how they were treated in the detention and the public prosecution. The statements below are for each detainee and are made as per the referral case No. 1492/2007 by the Prosecutions office and dated January 17, 2008:

**Maytham Al-Shaikh:** "Judge; I was sexually assaulted and tortured. I was frequently electrocuted. On the new year's eve, one of the torturers said to me "Tonight, we will celebrate with you the new year". That night, I was electrocuted from 12 midnight until 7o'clock in the morning. Security authority confiscated my brother's laptop as well as my own sport shoes on the night of arrest. I am innocent and not guilty".

Isa Al-Sarh: " I was abducted from my car in the street by face-masked persons. They refused to identify themselves. I was tortured and beaten. I was threatened to have my wife attacked and raped if I donot confess on certain people among them Ibrahim Al-Arab. I confessed what the torturers wanted. Ibrahim and others whom I was forced to tell their names are innocent. I am innocent and not guilty".

**Naji Fateel:** "I was arrested on 21 December 2007 from my house without a warrant which I asked for. Tthe officer nudged my head saying repeatedly: (move it, move it), asking me to leave the house. I was beaten in front of my father, wife and children. The security individuals ruined the content of my house. In the interrogation center, I was crucified and electrocuted for ten consecutive days. I was beaten on my gentiles. The interrogation officer instructed the torturers to keep beating on the sensitive areas until my urine has mixed with blood. The Public Prosecution (PP) was unfortunately biased. At the PP, the interrogation officer was asking me to sign the drafted confession, I told him I need a lawyer and that I was tortured in the Criminal Investigations Bureau (CIB). He refused my request and further threatened (If you donot sign the confession I

will call for your return back to the CIB), insinuating the exposure to torture. I refused to sign the confession, and when I returned to the CIB, I received another doze of torture because what I said to the prosecutor. I was beaten and crucified in front of two detainees Maytham and Abdulla. They are witnesses. I was taken after that ordeal to the PP again. During the detention, members of the CIB accompanied me to my house to look for the alleged missing weapon, there was nothing, which confirms that I am innocent and not guilty"

**Mohamed Abdallah Al-Singace** (Pronounced else: Al Singais and also Al Sankis): "My house was ransacked and its contents were destroyed, I wasnot there then. None of my family was present. Armed security forces attacked my father's house at noon time on Eid day when I was having lunch with the rest of the family. Children and women were terrorized. I was exposed to different types of torture known to members of the security body. These include Falaqa, Butterfly and Scorpio. Judge, you may enquire about these names, they know it. From first day of detention, I was stripped off my clothes and was made naked, except from my pant, during the interrogation. The torturers frequently take off the pant, sexually molest me and try to assault me saying the "F" words indicating that, excuse this expression Judge, that (they will do the obscene). The coroner indicated that I need to be seen by a psychiatric, and that he doesnt know why I have problem in my blood. Today, I have an appointment with the psychiatrist, but because of the trial, it has been postponed. The BDF (Bahrain Defence Force) doctor told me that 80% of my back had been destroyed, and I am now left with only 20%. I am innocent of all the charges "

**Hasan Abdalnabi:** "Judge, I was arrest from the street by masked members who did not disclose their identities. I was then with my wife. At the CIB, they told me that they also arrested my wife and that she would be assaulted if I donot confess. They said that they will photoimage me and wife with naked women if I donot confess. They forced me to contact my wife by phone and tell her my confessions, which I I am innocent of. Even after interrogations, we were still tortured, the marks of which are still visible on our bodies. We are still held incommunicado detention. I am innocent and not guilty".

Ali Almadhi: "I was arrested from my house and was exposed to torture and beatings. I was threatened of sexual assault if I donot confess. I am innocent and not guilty"

**Husain Khatam:** "They attacked my house and arrested me. I was beaten and tortured. I am innocent and not guilty"

**Ahmed Jafar:** "Judge, I am innocent of all charges, and not related to the incident. I ask for my release on bail of guaranteeing my residence"

Hussein Jafar Turaif: "I have been subjected to beatings and torture .. I am innocent and not guilty"

Abdullah Mohsin: "I was not around at the scene the day of the incident, and I know some of the detainees only in the jail. I was arrested from my house. I am innocent"

**Mohammed Makki:** "I was sexually molested, tortured and beaten on my gentiles. The torturer was saying to me (We will beat you on your gentiles until blood comes out as your urinate). I am innocent and not guilty"

**Hussein Shaker Mohamed:** "I was assaulted in my house and tortured in detention. In CIB, the interrogation officer asked for my wife to be brought without her veil, and that he dislikes the veil (Hijab), so I confess with what he wants. The officer also threatened to expel my wife to her country, as she does not hold a Bahraini passport. I am innocent and not guilty"

**Mahmoud Hasan Saleh:** "I have been beaten, tortured and sexually molested. I am innocent and not guilty".

**Ahmed Abdulhadi:** "I was abducted from the street, without a warrant, by masked members and said they are police. I was exposed to ten executive days of beatings and electrocution. I was tortured and threatened with sexual assault. They said either you confess or else.. I am innocent of all charges "

**Ibrahim Al Arab:** "When I was arrested in my house, the officer told me that I am not with the group but I must confess to the place arms. At the CIB, the interrogating officer reiterated the same and that I must confess. I am innocent and not guilty".

The detainees finished their deliberations, after which defendants lawyers, headed by Mr. Abdullah Al-shamlawi, made their intervention and asked that detainee's talk to be documented and included within the record of the court session. He said that let everybody recall the words of the detainees who unanimously agreed that they were exposed to physical and mental torture. Mr Al-Shamlawi requested from the judge that an independent medical commission, not from the Ministry of Interior, is to be formed to look into the medical status of the detainees. The lawyers also requested copies of the case file in order to study the case. The judge ordered the inclusion of what the detainees stated of their ordeal, requested the composition of the medical commission to examine them, and that the lawyers to receive a copy of the case file.

## BBC: Bahrain Shia call for activists' release

By Bill Law  
Reporter, BBC Crossing Continents

Human rights activists in the Gulf state of Bahrain are calling on the government to release 15 protesters jailed in late December. They say the prisoners, who are Shia Muslims, have been subjected to torture and sexual abuse while in jail.

Bahrain is unique in all the states of the Arabian Peninsula in that it has a Shia majority, roughly 65% of the population. But the ruling elite is Sunni. Shia Bahrainis say they have been discriminated against for years. In a courtroom in Manama, the capital city of Bahrain, on 24 February, 15 Shia men stood before Judge Mohammed Ali al-Khalifa. They were asked how they pled to charges arising from riots in December of last year.

Before entering a plea of not guilty, each man read out a statement alleging systematic torture while in detention.

After they spoke, they were denied bail and returned to prison.

### Torture allegations

Abduljalil Alsingace is the media director of the Shia Haq political party. His brother Mohammed was among those arrested.

Mr Alsingace told me Mohammed was subjected to severe torture including the falaqa or beating on the soles of the feet.

He told me Mohammed was held in solitary confinement in a tiny room, handcuffed and sexually molested.

Mohamed has also been forced, he says, to witness the torture and abuse of the other detainees. The Bahrain government strongly rejects the allegations.

In a statement given to the BBC, Shaikh Abdulaziz al-Khalifa, a senior government representative in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs said: "I can categorically deny that any form of torture or sexual abuse took place." He called the claims "tired and formulaic" and told me they are "routinely used by well-known anti-government groups to try and discredit the government".

### Sectarian violence

I first visited the Gulf state in July of last year to make a Crossing Continents programme for the BBC about sectarian violence between Sunni and Shia.

The evening I arrived I found myself in the midst of a riot in the small Shia fishing village of Malkiya on the outskirts of the capital Manama.

In the eerie light of fires from burning piles of garbage and blazing tyres, young men roamed the streets, occasionally hurling stones at a line of balaclava masked riot police.

The stench of tear gas hung in the air. When I approached the police line I was brusquely told to clear off. As we left the police fired off another volley of tear gas.

Known in the west as a booming business centre, Bahrain is increasingly an upmarket

tourist destination with luxury villas built on land reclaimed from the sea.

### The new oil

The royal al-Khalifa family has grown enormously wealthy on oil revenues. But the oil is running out. For the ruling family, land has become the new oil.

In this tiny island nation the public, we were told, has access to less than 3% of the coastline. The rest is in private hands and much of it is controlled by the al-Khalifas. Ownership of the coast allows access to reclaimed land from the sea. This is then sold on to the highest bidder to build another business complex or a five-star tourist resort.

In Malkiya a cousin of the king seized a beach that had been used by the villagers for generations. It was that action which set off the protests.

Shortly after our programme went out, the King made a visit to Malkiya. He ordered his cousin to restore the beach to

the villagers. That helped to end unrest there but the violence continued in other Shia villages, fuelled by resentment about growing poverty, poor housing and rampant unemployment.

### Iran blamed

Many among the Sunni elite believe that Shia Iran is behind the unrest.

The Shia says those claims are nonsense. They insist they are loyal to Bahrain and the ruling family.

In December of last year Bahrain was wracked by almost nightly rioting touched off when a young protester was allegedly beaten to death by members of the Bahraini Special Security Forces. The government responded to the rioting by arresting the 15 Shia activists and charging them with offences ranging from being present at an illegal gathering to the burning of a police vehicle. The activists deny all the charges.

The trial of the 15 has now been postponed until 17 March.

## Strike by Asian workers

A series of strikes by low-paid Asian workers in Bahrain has shaken their image as compliant laborers and has been blamed on the erosion of their meagre earnings as the US dollar slides, experts say. The latest of three strikes by hundreds of workers over the past fortnight ended on Saturday when laborers agreed to halt a week-long stoppage in return for a wage rise of 15 dinars (\$40) a month, a union official said. Around 1,300 mostly Indian workers helping to build the Durrat Al-Bahrain development in the south of the Gulf archipelago went on strike on February 9 to demand a pay rise. They demanded that salaries be increased from 57 dinars (\$151) to 100 dinars (\$265) a month for unskilled laborers, and from 69 dinars (\$183) to 120 dinars (\$319) for their skilled counterparts. Sayyed Salman, deputy head of Bahrain's federation of labor unions, told AFP that: "In the past they were obedient because their remittances were sizeable. The slump in the value of the dollar has eroded their purchasing power and they are feeling the pinch," economist Khaled Abdullah told AFP.

The Bahraini dinar is pegged to the dollar, like most other Gulf Arab currencies. Another factor that has encouraged the workers to protest is "the growing international interest in the (conditions of) migrant workers, especially in the Gulf", Abdullah added. International rights groups often criticise oil-rich Gulf Arab states for their treatment of expatriate laborers. Bahrain has about 270,000 expatriate workers out of a total population of 707,000. Mostly from the Asian subcontinent, they are employed mainly to do unskilled work. Workers employed in non-vital sectors are permitted to strike, but foreigners do not belong to local labour unions.

## Fiasco at show trial

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from Sanabis, Abdullah Muhsin Abdulla Saleh, 30, from Isa Town, member of the Committee of the Unemployed, Mohammad Makki, Ahmad, 19, from Sanabis, Hussain Shakir Mohammad Fardan Shakar, 35, from Bani Jamra, Mahmood Hassan Saleh, from Daih, Ahmad Abdul Hadi Ahmad Mahdi Salman, 17, from Al Maqsha and Ibrahim Mohammad Amin Al Arab, from Bani Jamra, member of the Committee of the Islamic Action Society.

The trial was first adjourned to the afternoon, and the lawyers protested against this decision. The Al Khalifa-appointed lawyer then decided to adjourn the whole trial until 24<sup>th</sup> February. As the prisoners exhibited clear signs of torture, he realised it was an embarrassment to start the proceedings against the defendants.

The people reacted angrily against the decision to postpone the show trial. There have been protests and demonstrations in various parts of the country. More protests are scheduled for today in Sanabis, and another one in Sitra on Friday 8<sup>th</sup> February.

Moreover, five unemployed graduates have called for a protest tomorrow outside the department of civil service. They are: Sayyed Hashim Sayyed Khalil, Ahmad Abdullah Al Shehabi, Abdul Raoof Abdul Rahim, Yasser Isa Al Shawoosh and Ra'ed Abdul Nabi Salman.

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