

BAHRAIN

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

Who dares wins: Awaiting the eventual showdown against dictatorship

The systematic eradication of the symbols of civil society in Bahrain has taken a leap forward in recent years through a series of laws and rules that have been condemned by local and international Non-Governmental Organisations. The country has been going a dramatic shift in attention and direction since the present ruler, Sheikh Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa took office almost a decade ago. The country has been transformed from a state to a private property run by the Al Khalifa clique. In the process the native population are being marginalised, oppressed and forcibly destined to extinction. The talk of modernisation is camouflage for heinous acts and policies. The ruling family has emptied the words attached to civility, democracy and modernisation of their meaning. The country has thus achieved new forms of democracy, human rights and civil society organisations that are distinct in their essence, form and mission. The ruler is the source of legislation, and members of his various bodies (that he names as parliament, municipalities council) have only one duty; to rubber stamp his rules and regulations. It is a democracy based on "I talk you listen" and one that aims at obliterating the culture and existence of the natives of the country. The various laws and constitutional articles have been designed to ensure total subjugation of the people and undisputed domination of the Al Khalifa.

On the level of human rights, the situation has not fared better. Dozens of Bahrainis are languishing behind bars for speaking out against the authoritarian rule and hereditary dictatorship. The ruler is the one who decides their fate, not the judiciary. The courts are often presided over by Al Khalifa members who have grudges against the defendants and are thus part of the problem. The verdicts are often transmitted downward from the top leadership. Once they are meted on prisoners, the "merciful" ruler intervenes to annule them and probable set the prisoners free. Complaints of systematic torture are always ignored despite their severity. The current prisoners of conscience have exposed their mutilated flesh at the courts, but their calls for investigating the torturers have fallen on deaf ears. Since the ruling family had occupied the land, no criminal accused of torture has been brought to answer for

inflicting suffering and torture on the Bahrainis. These torturers are Bahrainis, British, Pakistanis or Jordanians. Sheikh Hamad had decided to shelter them when he decreed the notorious Law 56/2002 that granted impunity to all torturers including some who had spent a lifetime in inflicting pain on Bahrainis such as Adel Flaifel. The architect of torture in post-colonial era was Ian Henderson who enjoys the protection and the "generosity" of the ruling family at the expense of the Bahrainis. It is a dilemma that will continue as long as these policies are imposed by force on the people of Bahrain. The ruling Al Khalifa family have supported their campaign of terror with the vast oil revenues which have been channelled to the ruler and his clique, while the Bahrainis have been treated the underdogs. The ruling family has failed to provide the most basic services to the people. The last summer was plagued by the persistent power cuts that left the people gasping for breath during the summer months when temperature soared to more than 50 degrees. Its intriguing to see a small country with less than one million inhabitants and with vast amounts of oil money, suffering power cuts at this scale. However, no one has been made to account for this severe shortage. Instead, Bahrainis have been punished for throwing stones against the vehicles of the death squads who had come to attack the villages of the natives. In the words of some western observers what is happening in Bahrain is reminiscent of the Israeli policies towards the Palestinians. During the holy month of Ramadhan, the people have been tortured by these power cuts to the extent that many people spent their time in their air-conditioned cars to escape their unbearable homes. Who is responsible? Who are the culprits? How long will it take for Sheikh Hamad and his clique to realise the failure of their policies and the need for an immediate adjustment away from dictatorship and self-styled kings and princes?

Bahrain has now entered a new phase of its political struggle. It is a struggle that has spanned over more than eight decades and refused to give in to the hereditary dictatorship of the Al Khalifa dynasty. It is a struggle between freedom and tribal feudalism, between love of life

and the mentality of destruction. The people rely on their natural power of faith, truth, love of justice and constructive engagement with each other and with the outside world. The ruling family relies on financial and political power, deception and outside support to face the people. Recent events have shown the lack of humanity in their thinking and policies. The dismissal of trade unionist from Bapco (Bahrain Petroleum Company) for protesting against policies of discrimination against the natives, is likely to backfire with destructive consequences to their political entity. The failure of the regime to provide essential services is yet another catastrophe. The inability of the ruling family to provide housing to the poor, forcing them to the limits of despair is also a source of political volatility. With soaring commodity prices the level of poverty has become a source of anxiety to most citizens. The aim of these policies is to create impossible living conditions for the natives, and force them to seek shelter in neighbouring countries. It is part of the displacement programme adopted by Sheikh Hamad as part of the demographic engineering against the natives. These policies have gradually polarised the society against the ruling family.

Today, there is hardly anyone who does not suffer from ill-treatment, lack of services, scarcity of housing, low wages, high inflation and, above all, the negative impact of the political naturalisation process on the quality of life of Bahrainis. When a well-known pro-democracy activist, Hisham Al Shehabi, passed away last month, aged 66, the public expression of grief has been a source of inspiration for young activists who look for role models as they strive to achieve their rights. Mr Al Shehabi, a Sunni Muslim with liberal views, spent half of a century in the struggle, especially as a trade unionist and pro-democracy activist. He was a founder member of Haq Movement, that is banned by the ruling family. People are now waiting for a political opening as time has become detrimental to their rights. It has overstayed its stay, mismanaged its relations with the natives and transformed into a hated dictatorship. It is hoped that the light at the end of the tunnel will materialise into a real change that rids the country of this hated dictatorial regime.

Bahrain: Concern at continuing detention and torture of innocent

As the plight of tens of political prisoners remains continues to be shrouded in mystery, the people are raising their voices in protest against the ruling Al Khalifa family and pleading to the world to intervene to end the suffering of Bahrainis. Yesterday, burning tyres were seen at the Budayya Road, in the vicinity of Abu Saibe' village. Road traffic was disrupted for a while as fire engines rushed to the scene to extinguish the raging fires. The aim of the organisers of this protest was to highlight the plight of the prisoners of conscience who had been taken hostage by Sheikh Hamad's death squads. They are known to have suffered extensive injuries as a result of torture and maltreatment.

Bahrain has not ratified the special protocol within the Convention Against Torture (CAT). Several human rights organisations have recently urged the ruling family to sign the protocol as a step forward to prevent the administration of torture against prisoners. On 12th September six NGOs signed a declaration urging the authorities to undertake this step. The signatories are: The Bahrain Society for Human Rights, The Bahrain Centre of Human Rights, Bahrain Youth Society for Human Rights, The Bahraini Society to Support civil Liberties, Haq Movement and the Women Petition Committee. They

based their call on several factors: Bahrain's commitment as a signatory of CAT (it signed it on 6th March 1998), its obligation under Article 7 of the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights which was signed by Bahrain on 20th September 2006 and in light of the damning comments against the ruling family during the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) undertaken in April by the UN Human Rights Council. The international community was appalled by the failure of the ruling family to investigate the horrendous crimes of torture by granting of impunity to torturers in accordance with the notorious Law 56/2002. It is unlikely that the Al Khalifa will heed the call to ratify the international conventions relating to torture for fear that it may implicate senior figures of the ruling family including ruler and the prime minister.

In another serious development, a high profile human rights activist was sacked from his post as a senior Mechanical engineer with BAPCO (Bahrain Petroleum Company). Mr Abbas Al Omran was arbitrarily dismissed from his job after fifteen years of outstanding service. For the past two years he has been targeted by the company for two main reasons. First because of his record as a human rights activist. Second, his activities in BAPCO's trade

union. Immediately after his election to the union, he found out a web of intrigues by both the union and the company and raised the alarms to the members. He was faced with extreme hostility from both the company and the president of the union. Since then Mr Al Omran has been denied any promotion, and found himself trailing behind his colleagues as a result. He wrote to both the company and trade union about this but to no avail. He threatened to go on the picket line if his complaints were not addressed. He picketed outside the company's offices and after the third picket (yesterday) he was sacked.

Mr Abdul Hadi Al Khawaja, the former President of the Bahrain Centre for Human Rights (BCHR) has been appointed as the Middle East Coordinator for Frontline, the international body for the defence of human rights defenders. The Dublin-based organisation also has an office in Brussels, near the European Parliament. Mr Al Khawaja has a long record of human rights works that he started when he was in exile in the eighties. The BCHR committee held a meeting to decide the next step following Mr Al Khawaja's resignation. It is now headed by Nabeel Rajab who has been elected the new President.

Bahrain Freedom Movement
17th September 2008

Damning report by Freedom House

A damning report has been published by the Washington-based Freedom House, that describes itself as "a clear voice for democracy and freedom around the world. The overview of the Freedom House 2008 report states clearly the following: "The government of Bahrain pursued its crackdown on opposition activists in 2007. Critics of the ruling al-Khalifa family staged regular public gatherings demanding greater human and political rights, which security forces forcibly dispersed. Authorities continued to limit free expression, blocking access to popular websites and detaining prominent figures who publicly criticized state leaders. Meanwhile, simmering sectarian tensions between the country's majority Shiite population and the ruling Sunni minority persisted during the year."

The policy of repression has continued unabated throughout the year. Several local NGOs have published a joint statement condemning the recent decision by the ruling family to punish civil servants severely if they oppose the regime in any way. The Civil Service Office has issued details of this policy of revenge against those who take part in public demonstrations even if they take place outside office hours. The punishment could reach the stage of dismissal. Last week the ministry of education and the various departments attached to it issued a circular to all

employees with some details of the intended revenge actions. It said: "Anyone who calls for, takes part in or encourage strikes in the government sectors will be liable to punishment that could reach dismissal from his/her job". Five local NGOs signed a statement against this escalation in the war by the ruling family against Bahrainis. Among the signatories are the Bahrain Centre for Human Rights, Haq Movement, the Society of Bahrain Youth for Human Rights, the Bahraini Society for Human Rights and the Society to support public freedoms.

Meanwhile the ruling family has decided to delay further the release of prisoners falsely accused of committing arson attacks. A foreign policeman died last December in suspicious circumstances (and is widely believed to have been killed by other policemen after a row among them). The farm of a notorious torturer (Abdul Azia Atiyyat Allah Al Khalifa) was also attacked. The court session, presided over by a member of the ruling Al Khalifa family, yesterday adjourned the trial until 6th October. The Bahrainis who appeared at the show trial exposed their horrific tortures and detailed their ordeal during the session, but the Al Khalifa failed to take action to investigate the crime of torture against the powerless prisoners. They named Ali Qambar as one of those who had committed gross violations of human rights against them and administered inhumane acts against several of

them. The Al Khalifa judge refused to order an investigation into this crime and, instead of ordering their immediate release, has adjourned the trial. Among the torture techniques administered against them is subjecting them to stand for long periods, using electric shocks, pouring cold water onto them, denying them family visits and cursing their religion.

At another level, senior religious scholars have signed a statement condemning the banning by the ruling family of building mosques and matams (congregation halls used by Shia Muslims to commemorate their martyrs). The statement is a rare step by the scholars who have sought not to escalate the encounter with the ruling family, and it indicates the extent of anger simmering in the hearts of Bahrainis as the ruling family continues its single-handed crimes against the people of Bahrain. The decision came at a time when fingers of accusation are pointed to senior members of the Al Khalifa for failing to distributed housing units intended for those who have no house or shelter. It was reported that a senior female member of the ruling family has snatched all the houses intended for the homeless although people had been informed that they had been given a house. More than 200 of the homeless have taken part in a peaceful picket for several weeks asking for their houses to be returned to them.

Bahrain Freedom Movement
8th September 2008

Local NGO's Denounce Policing Measures

We, the undersigned institutions, express our deep concerns about the arbitrary administrative measures recently circulated by the Bahraini Ministry of Education, upon instructions from Civil Service Bureau (CSB), regarding punishment of state employees who participate in unauthorized public sit-ins and marches, even if outside office hours. This retribution includes those involved in activities which "disturb security and stability." According to the said circular, the punishment of CSB against public officials reaches to dismissal from work if they violated those laws and regulations, or in the case they were prosecuted and penalized through judicial proceedings as a result of those violations.

At the end of last week, marking the beginning of the new academic year, the ministry of Education (MOE) circulated, to public schools and affiliated institutions, instructions from the CSB, mandating strict legal actions against public officials violating laws and regulations or facing any judicial proceedings as a result of their participation in riots or sabotaging public or private properties or participating in unauthorized rallies and sit-ins, and all acts that undermine security and stability. The circular stated that "All those, calling or joining or provoking strike in vital facilities, will be punishable by dismissal from service" as well as those "organizing unauthorized or permitted protests or calling for participation or incitement, the penalty would be dismissal".

It is believed that these administrative procedures are linked, one way or another, with the growing popular protests and demands as results of political resentment in the country because of lack of providing solutions for the outstanding issues such as discrimination and sectarian apartheid, resettlement and political naturalization, political prisoners and human rights defenders and endemic corruption in the Government.

The circulation by the MOE and instructions by the CSB are blatant restrictions on freedom of assembly and expression, freedom of labour union activities, and in breach of international charters and covenants, notably the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), whose Article 21 states that "The right of peaceful assembly shall be recognized. No restrictions may be placed on the exercise of this right other than those imposed in conformity with the law and which are necessary in a democratic society in the interests of national security or public safety, public order (ordre public), the protection of public health or morals or the protection of the rights and freedoms of others". These measure also violate Article 22 of

of the same Covenant and states that "Everyone shall have the right to freedom of association with others, including the right to form and join trade unions for the protection of his interests".

These are arbitrary actions are supplementary punishments for penalties brought up by the notorious Bahraini Penal Code, and is a violation and breach of 7th paragraph of Article 14 of ICCPR, which states that "No one shall be liable to be tried or punished again for an offence for which he has already been finally convicted or acquitted in accordance with the law and penal procedure of each country".

The signed societal institutions expressed its fears of the local Authorities continued restriction of public freedoms, and calls that treating protests of legitimate demands are not in the manner pursued by dictator or policing regimes. The signed NGOs deplore the intolerance of the authorities for the exercise of state employees to their

rights, guaranteed by international charters and conventions which have been joined by Bahrain and pledged its commitment before the world.

The Bahraini authorities are to retreat from these security measures aimed at narrowing the area of freedom of assembly and expression, freedom of union work, and to allow for a broader horizon of the exercise of these rights as guaranteed by international charters and reservations, and to seriously develop radical solutions to all issued causing frustration among Bahraini, instead of mobilizing security solutions which make matters more complicated.

Signatories

- 1- Bahrain Center for Human Rights
- 2- Bahrain Society for Human Rights
- 3- Bahrain Society for Public Freedoms
- 4- Bahrain Youth Society of Human Rights (BYSHR)
- 5- Women Petition Committee
- 6- Movement of Liberties and Democracy "HAQ"

Unionist and Human Rights Activist Fired after Exposing Corruption

BCHR Ref: 08091600

The Bahrain Centre for Human Rights (BCHR) is highly concerned upon receiving news that the prominent human right activist and unionist Mr. Abbas Al Omran, member of the Bahrain Centre for Human rights and former member of the BAPCO www.bapco.net Workers Union, was fired today from his job. The Centre fears that this step taken by BAPCO (Bahrain Petroleum Company) comes as retaliation to Mr. Abbas's activities and is related to Mr. Abbas's exposure of members of the workers union and his allegation that they were receiving bribes from the company. In 2006 Mr. Abbas sent a letter to the company with information about these alleged bribes demanding answers, and he has been harassed ever since.

In a recent letter about the harassment he has been exposed to, Mr. Abbas wrote "My isolation in this situation makes me exposed to revenge and spiteful actions especially considering my trade union activities and my insistence on exercising my rights." Since the news of his dismissal, Mr. Abbas has been holding a sit in outside the company as a protest to the unjust decision. The police observing the sit-in have already threatened to arrest Mr. Abbas, they have denied him the right to display his banners, and will not allow more than three family members or supporters to join him.

"Targeting human rights activists and unionists and cutting off their income because of their activities, and then fabricating reasons for those unjust actions, is not only uncivilized but also immoral and does not beseem a big and

known company which should respect the rights of their employees. This will have a very negative influence on the company's reputation." Nabeel Rajab, president of the BCHR

The BCHR requests your urgent intervention in insuring the safety of Mr. Omran and calls for the following:

1. That Mr. Omran be reinstated immediately.
2. That his allegations of corruption are investigated by an objective third party
3. That human rights activist and unionists are protected
4. That the police cease to harass activists and avoid intervening on behalf of the company.
5. That the General Federation of Bahrain Trade Unions speaks out and be actively involved in defending the rights of unionists.

For further information and details on this case kindly contact

Nabeel Rajab, president of BCHR on (00973) 39633399

Abbas Al-Omran, (00973) 39875458



Freedom House Report:BAHRAIN 2008

The government of Bahrain pursued its crackdown on opposition activists in 2007. Critics of the ruling al-Khalifa family staged regular public gatherings demanding greater human and political rights, which security forces forcibly dispersed. Authorities continued to limit free expression, blocking access to popular websites and detaining prominent figures who publicly criticized state leaders. Meanwhile, simmering sectarian tensions between the country's majority Shiite population and the ruling Sunni minority persisted during the year.

In 2007, Bahraini authorities cracked down systematically and violently on the most outspoken members of the opposition. In February, police arrested two prominent activists, Abdulhadi al-Khawaja and Hassam Mushaima, for criticizing the prime minister. King Hamad pardoned both, but their arrests were consistent with an ongoing pattern of harassment. On December 17, security forces killed a demonstrator protesting the state's past use of torture in the predominantly Shiite village of Sinabis. The government subsequently arrested dozens of activists; more than two dozen remained imprisoned at year's end. Bahraini human rights organizations allege that the detainees have been subjected to regular torture and sexual assault.

Political Rights and Civil Liberties

Bahrain is not an electoral democracy. The 2002 constitution gives the king power over the executive, legislative, and judicial authorities. He appoints cabinet ministers and members of the 40-seat Consultative Council, the upper house of the National Assembly. The lower house, or Council of Representatives, consists of 40 popularly elected members serving four-year terms. The National Assembly may propose legislation, but the cabinet must draft the laws. A July 2002 royal decree forbids the National Assembly from deliberating on any action that was taken by the executive branch before December 2002—the date the new National Assembly was inaugurated.

Formal political parties are illegal in Bahrain, but the government allows political societies or groupings to operate and organize activities in the country. In August 2005, the king, Sheikh Hamad bin Isa al-Khalifa, ratified a new political associations law that made it illegal to form political associations based on class, profession, or religion, and required all political associations to register with the Ministry of Justice. Although Bahrain has some anticorruption laws, enforcement is weak, and high-ranking officials suspected of corruption are rarely punished. Bahrain was ranked 46 out of 180 countries surveyed in Transparency International's 2007 Corruption Perceptions Index.

Freedom of expression is restricted in Bahrain, and the authorities routinely harass activists who criticize them publicly. The

government owns all broadcast media outlets, but the country's three main newspapers are privately owned. According to the 2002 Press Law, the state can imprison journalists for criticizing the king or Islam, or for threatening "national security," an intentionally vague provision that gives authorities wide latitude in cracking down on speech. Authorities continued to control access to opposition and human rights websites and to block access to blogs in 2007. Despite the restrictive nature of the Bahraini press law, print media features considerable debate among government supporters as well as the opposition regarding reform, parliament's effectiveness, and sectarianism.

Bahrain has no formal laws or regulations that limit academic freedom, but teachers and professors tend to avoid politically sensitive topics and issues in the classroom and in their research. Scholars who criticize the government are subject to dismissal from their jobs. While there are limits to public speech, Bahrainis engage in robust private discussion in their homes, cafés, and political salons.

Severe restrictions on freedom of assembly were enacted in 2006. Citizens must obtain a license to hold demonstrations, rallies, and marches, which are now banned from sunrise to sunset in any public arena. The new legislation further stipulates that protesters are forbidden to carry any weapons, flammable products, or sticks. Bahraini police regularly use violence to break up political demonstrations, most of which occur in Shiite villages. As frustration with the al-Khalifa family surged in 2007, state security forces, mostly composed of foreign nationals, regularly used force to disperse public gatherings.

Bahrain has seen growth in the number of nongovernmental organizations focused on charitable activities, human rights, and women's rights, but these groups continue to face restrictions. The Bahrain Center for Human Rights (BCHR) was closed and dissolved by the government in September 2004. Although the center remains officially closed, its members continue to operate. The Ministry of Social Development has threatened to pursue legal action against a number of civil and human rights groups that are operating without permits. The 1989 Societies Law prohibits any society from operating without an official permit.

In January 2007, a Bahraini court sentenced two political activists to prison terms for possessing leaflets calling for a boycott of the 2006 parliamentary elections; the two were released in February. Nevertheless, state authorities during the year continued to detain activists who spoke out against government policies. Human rights campaigner `Abd al-Hadi al-Khawaja was arrested for the second time in three years and charged with trea-

son. The king dropped the case against al-Khawaja and two others in May following violent street clashes between security forces and demonstrators. Also in 2007, Ghada Jamsheer, an outspoken advocate for women's rights and Sharia (Islamic law) court reform, was banned from appearing on local broadcast media or publishing in the Bahraini press.

Bahrainis have the right to establish independent labor unions without government permission. A royal decree conferring that right also imposes limits, including a two-week notice to employers before a strike and a prohibition on strikes in vital sectors such as security, civil defense, transportation, hospitals, communications, and basic infrastructure. A 2006 amendment to the labor law stipulates that private sector employees cannot be dismissed for union activities. Foreign workers are not protected by the labor law. They do not have the right to organize or seek help from Bahraini unions. As a result, foreign laborers are subject to various kinds of abuse. Throughout 2007, Bahraini activists pressed for greater protection for expatriates in Bahrain, most notably the country's 40,000 domestic workers.

The judiciary is not independent of the executive branch. The king appoints all judges, and courts have been subject to government pressure. The Ministry of the Interior is responsible for public security within the country and oversees the police and internal security services. Members of the royal family hold all security-related offices. Bahrain's anti-terrorism law prescribes the death penalty for members of terrorist groups and prison terms for those who use religion to spread extremism. This legislation has been criticized on the grounds that its definition of terrorist crimes is too broad and could lead to a heightened risk of torture and arbitrary detention. Living conditions within prison facilities have greatly improved. Prisoners are permitted to make weekly telephone calls to their families, and prisoners of all faiths have access to holy books and clergy.

Although Shiites constitute a majority of the citizenry, they are underrepresented in government and face various forms of discrimination. Over the last four years, Bahrain's Sunnis have become increasingly sectarian, accusing the country's Shiites of not supporting the al-Khalifa family and serving as a fifth column for Iran. Fears of Shiite power have led to limited employment opportunities for young Shiite men in the public and private sectors, as well as attempts by the government to alter the country's demographic balance, mostly by granting citizenship to Sunnis from Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Syria, and Pakistan. Bahrainis have the right to travel freely inside and outside the country.

[http://www.freedomhouse.org/
template.cfm?](http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?)

[page=22&year=2008&country=7348](http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=22&year=2008&country=7348)