

BAHRAIN

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

The U-turn by a desperate regime could exacerbate its downfall

The fast-developing events in Bahrain have taken many by surprise, not least, those who had supported the Al Khalifa. As the sage of the "plotters" and "traitors" unfolded, disillusionment amongst them left unmistakable signs not only on their faces, but also in their psyche and minds. How could these "criminal" against whom complaints were made to the United Nations Security Council, the Arab League and the Gulf Cooperation Council, be so swiftly released before their trial ended? If they had really plotted such heinous crimes, who would blame the Al Khalifa for sentencing each of them to life imprisonment, if not execution? Or was the whole episode a fantasy created by a desperate regime which felt that the waves were not going its own way? It is now clear that the trial session held on Tuesday 24th March 2009 had sealed their fate for release. The Al Khalifa were so badly defeated at that session that any further court appearances could lead to its international condemnation. The session was attended by international lawyers and human rights activists. Mr Hassan Mushaime, the "chief suspect" made the most of that session when he started to question the legality of the whole process, affirming the repressive nature of the regime and expressing his determination to stay behind bars as long as the liberation of his people needed. Then came the chance for some of the Bahraini hostages to speak. As details of the horrific treatment became clear, the ruler and his advisers were convinced that any subsequent trials could drag senior members of the Al Khlaifa family to testify to their role in torture. That would have brought the collapse of the regime several steps nearer. They took an immediate decision that it was safer for the Al Khlaifa dictatorship to make a U-turn than to see its members dragged by the Interpol to attend sessions at the International Criminal Court.

They were already shaking as the news that the office of Moreno Okampo, the ICC Prosecutor General, had received the first claims against Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa and three of his lieutenants for crimes against humanity. That process in itself was humiliating enough to a regime that had plundered the wealth of a nation on

promoting its image, distorting the facts and promising hollow democracy to a revolutionary generation. According to those lawyers, it became clear that the regime had no case at all. Infact, the letter of the UK Minister for Foreign Affairs, Bill Rammell, in March had already caused the Al Khalifa enormous damage. In his reply to Lord Avebury, Mr Rammell said, in no ambiguous terms, that the Al Khalifa had violated their international commitments by parading their victims on TV screens, allegedly "confessing" their crimes. Those crimes were later ignored as it became clear to the international lawyers that they had been fabricated and the victims had been subjected to a good deal of torture. The Al Khalifa "judge" was seen as a foe, a prosecutor and plaintiff, in clear violation of the most basic principles of justice. He was taken aback as the tails of the horrific torture endured by the victims started to accumulate in the presence of those foreign "unwelcome guests". He immediately ordered the adjournment of the trial until 28th April. He gave himself and his family enough time to reconsider their position. It rained down on them that the safest option would be to swallow their pride, order the victims out of their torture chambers and stave off a potential storm. The ruler did not take long to follow the "advice". In a sudden turn of events he ordered the unconditional release of most of the political prisoners without explanation. For the opposition, it was a news they had known earlier would come soon. They had relentlessly campaigned against this blatant oppression by the regime and would accept nothing less than a total submission by the hereditary dictatorship. This time they got what they wanted. Since the release of the pro-democracy activists, led by Mr Mushaime, they have become more blatant in their moves. They now plan what one of them said "to shake the earth under their feet" by dragging the torturers and the proponents of torture to the international justice. In the past few years they have built an international base of friendship and support that will enable

them to process their writs against the criminals with relative ease. It is also reported that a state of confusion has spread within the ruling hierarchy as many of their allies, inside and outside Bahrain, became astounded by the downturn of events.

The Formula races may have been a factor in taking the decision to release the torture victims, but it was also the will of some those prisoners who had refused to plea for pardon and those in the opposition outside the torture chambers that has contributed to the demoralization of the ruling junta. The struggle of the Bahraini people may have now entered a new phase. There is enthusiasm for a more serious change in the political regime in these troubled Gulf islands. The opposition has been emboldened enough to question the legitimacy of the Al Khalifa family, something they did not have the courage to express in previous episodes of the struggle. They are now openly calling the Al Khalifa rule "an occupation" and comparing it with the Israeli occupation of Palestine.

They are demanding that some senior members of the ruling family be tried for crimes against humanity. The various political bodies established by the ruling family in accordance with its 2002 constitution have failed to stave off the rising opposition which has engulfed the entire country in the past few weeks. The Al Khalifa re in an unenviable position as they struggle to look for legitimacy in people who, themselves, have lost the right to represent the people, and many of whom, have become immersed in the endemic financial and political corruption. It may be said safely that the next few months will be crucial in determining the direction of events not only in Bahrain, but also in other neighbouring Gulf states. With democratic institutions around the Gulf shores, it will not be long before change takes place along the Western shores of the Gulf. The West may still have some time to take its hands off these backward regimes. If it fails to do so, it will be yet another loser in the battle for change in the most strategic region in the world.

Vicious attack on peaceful protesters, Formula 1 reporters bear witness

The vicious attack yesterday by the Death Squads of the ruling Al Khalifa family on a peaceful demonstration in Sitra caused serious injuries to the people while several others were subjected to summary torture. The demonstration was held by the Bahrainis against the continued detention of 26 others who have languished in torture chambers for between four and 15 months. The protesters were peaceful but were targeted by riot police, chemical and tear gas and rubber bullets. Among those arrested were a young Bahraini, Nabil Abdulla Ali, who was viciously beaten before his release today. Eyewitnesses confirmed that the attackers used batons, their boots and fists against the helpless Bahraini. Other protests erupted at Al Malikiya which was besieged by riot police and Death Squads. One of the town's inhabitants, Hassan Ali Marzooq, was arrested and taken to Hamad Town police station, near Roundabout No 17. He was later transferred to hospital to treat to his severe wounds caused by the summary torture inflicted on him by the Al Khalifa thugs. He was released later. It has now become a routine practice to arrest a person, subject him to summary torture and beating and then release him. Another youth,

Following the international condemnation of the Al Khalifa for illegally holding Bahrainis who had expressed their opinion in peaceful ways, they have now decided to inflict maximum punishment in shortest time so as to avoid long-term imprisonment which had often ended in humiliation of the Al Khalifa occupiers. Among the demands of the protesters are: the unconditional release of all political prisoners, compensating them for their illegal detention and bringing torturers to justice. The protests spread to several areas including Budaya Road where columns of smoke were clearly visible in several places. Riot police and Death Squads were rushing from one place to another in a struggle against time to hide signs of public anger from the foreign journalists covering the races. The youth of Al Ma'amir also took to the streets to raise their slogans and call for an end to the dictatorship that is waging a relentless war against Bahrain. The areas of Al Daih and Al Sanabis also participated, with young protesters burning tyres on the main roads and shouting anti-regime slogans.

Columns of smoke were seen in several areas yesterday as the Bahrainis decided to mark the Formula 1 races with protests against the hereditary dictatorship and its

policies of genocide against the native Baharna. Some of the participants in those races have been contacted by the Opposition who informed them of the dictatorial nature of the Al Khalifa.

In another development, the prominent activist, Dr Abdul Jalil Al Singace was today prevented from leaving the country as he attempted to cross the causeway to Saudi Arabia. Yesterday he took part in the peaceful demonstration in Sitra. He had been implicated in the "coup" attempt claimed by the ruling family earlier this year. The episode became a farce when it was confirmed that the accused detainees had been subjected to horrific torture to force them to sign pre-prepared statements. The ruler, Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa, was advised to bring the badly-designed, badly-presented play to an immediate end. He was forced to concede defeat and order the immediate and unconditional release of the prisoners of conscience. Dr Al Singace was among those who had defied the ruling junta and continued his criticism of their dictatorial rule. He has, however, been banned from travel for fear that the regime's political fiasco might be exposed to the outside world.

Bahrain Freedom Movement
25th April 2009

International condemnation of detention and torture of 26 Bahrainis

The continuing detention of 26 Bahrainis by the torturers is causing anxiety and anger among the people of Bahrain who view them as hostages snatched by the Al Khalifa occupiers. While the release of 176 political prisoners has exposed the barbarity of the regime especially as more stories are told of the horrific torture they had endured. The current and former chiefs of the National Security apparatus are accused of masterminding the torture policies that have left many young Bahrainis maimed. Criminal proceedings are being contemplated by the victims while international human rights bodies are helping in compiling comprehensive dossiers of these heinous acts. The ruler is himself implicated in two major crimes; genocide and torture. Despite calls to halt these crimes, he has failed to heed them.

The remaining political hostages are: Hussain Abbas, 30, from Al Hajar, Sayyed Omran Sayyed Hamid Adnan Alwai, 24, Karzakkan, Sayyed Jawad Hamid Adnan Alawi, 30, Karzakkan, Sayyed Ahmad Adnan Alawi, 23, Karzakkan, Sayyed Sadiq Ibrahim Jum'a Majid, 26, Karzakkan, Abdullah Jum'a Abdullah Ali, 23, Karzakkan, Ibrahim Saleh Ibrahim Jaffar, 22, Karzakkan, Hamid Ibrahim Fardan, 27, Karzakkan, Hussain Mohammad Khatam Hussain

Mohammad, 28, Karzakkan, Kumial Ahmad Ali Abu Shari, 22, Karzakkan, Mohammad Makki Mansoor, 27, Karzakkan, Hussain Abdul Karim Makki Eid, 24, Karzakkan, Habib Mohammad Ashoor, 23, Karzakkan, Fadhel Abbas Ali Ahmad, 28, Karzakkan, Hussain Abbas Ali Ahmad, 25, Karzakkan, FAdhed Abbas Mohammad Ashoor, 25, Karzakkan, Hussain Ali Dhaif, 28, Karzakkan, Qasim Mohammad Khalil Ibrahim, 22, Al Ma'amir, Hussain Hamza Sarhan, 17, Ma'amir, SAdiq Jaffar Mahdi, 20, Ma'amir, Isa Ali Isa Sarhan, 17, Ma'amir, Jassim Hassan Ahmad, 22, Ma'amir and Mohammad Hassan Ahmad.

It is believed that those Bahraini youth are kept behind bars as a bargaining card by the ruling family. They hope that the release of the other prisoners would silence the people and prevent them from dynamic activism against the hereditary dictatorship. However barely one day after their release, the mood of the people changed dramatically as the realities of the Al Khalifa became evident. The Ruler has ruled out any dialogue with the people's representatives and ignored the calls for repealing the Al Khalifa constitution and replacing it with one that acknowledges the existence of the people and their rights in public politics. The ruling family has been deeply incensed by the systematic condemnation of their policies and their failure to

control public opinion inside and outside Bahrain. Their closest allies have raised serious concerns about the situation of human rights in the country, while international human rights bodies have begun legal proceedings against the ruler who has lost the confidence of Bahrainis.

Meanwhile the Saudi authorities have detained four Bahrainis for taking photographs while purchasing fuel at an oil depot. The four are falsely accused of taking photographs of sensitive sites, a charge that is totally unfounded the Bahrainis have crossed the causeway to do some shopping and visit some relatives. They are; Ali Abdul Nabi Ahmad Radhi, Ali Mohammad Ali Abdul Mohsin Fadhle Abbas Yousif Habib and Redha Abdul Nabi Ali Kahdem. Last year the Saudi authorities arrested eight Bahrainis in Saudi Arabia and accused them of taking images of sensitive Saudi installations. Five months later they were released unconditionally.

Meanwhile Mr Hassan Mushaime' and Sheikh Mohammad Habib Al Miqdad have taken to delivering lectures on daily basis, and have decided to continue their struggle for a modern constitution, ending the genocidal policies and stopping the political naturalisation process.

Bahrain Freedom Movement
17th April 2009

Serious developments help to defeat the Al Khalifa dictatorship

The developments of the past few weeks have created new realities that have, according to informed sources, forced the rulers and his clique to reconsider the ill-advised decision to arrest Bahrainis, incarcerate and torture them. The subsequent kidnap by the Hamad's Death Squads of Mr Hassan Mushaime' and Sheikh Mohammad Habib Al Miqdad, has now become a serious embarrassment to the regime. The international lawyers who had attended last month's show trial of what has now become known as the "Al Hujjaira Group" have confirmed that the only avenue available to the ruler is the immediate and unconditional release of the Bahrainis, before his closest allies in the West totally give any hope in his wisdom. They also said that the parading of the Bahrainis on TV screens allegedly "confessing to their crimes" has destroyed Hamad's case. They added their observations have led them to believe in several facts: first that the Bahrainis had been severely tortured. Second; that there was no case against them and that their detention is punishment for speaking out against the hereditary dictatorship. Third; that the longer they keep these people behind bar the more complicated the case becomes and the more likely that the ruler and his aides could become target for international criticism. Forth, that the ruler and his aides are guilty of crimes against humanity.

The ruler is reported to be so furious at the failure of his ministers in stemming the flow of criticism from various international bodies and news agencies. The latest criticism came from the US-based

Committee for the Protection of Journalists (CPJ) who issued a damning statement against the regime arguing that it is waging a war against freedom of expression at a much wider scale that had been assumed. News agencies have also taken serious interest in the events of Bahrain. Last week the New York Times published a long piece with images showing the Bahrainis resisting the Al Khalifa occupational forces. Yesterday, The Financial Times published another piece titled "The Kingdom burns at night" that describes the ongoing resistance to the Al Khalifa dictatorial rule. Two days ago, Reuters published a report on the House of Lords event. It was taken by several news agencies and satellite stations around the globe. It is now clear that the Al Khalifa have lost the media and human rights wars despite pumping in millions of dollars to woo journalists and others.

Similar sentiments were aired at the Press Conference organized by Lord Avebury, the Parliamentary Human Rights Group on Wednesday 8th April. Several speakers took to the platform to condemn the Al Khalifa ruling family for its cruelty and serious abuse of human rights. Among them were human rights activists and victims of torture. Dr Abdul Jalil Al Singace addressed the conference via a pre-recorded message in which he vowed to continue his struggle against the despotism and absolute monarchy. Another participant was Mr Maitham Badr Al Sheikh, who was released last week from his illegal detention after his health had deteriorated. He is now plagued by Multiple Sclerosis and doctors had warned the ruler that he would die if he remained in prison. In

his open testimony to the London conference, Mr Al Sheikh gave a graphic account of the torture he had endured during his incarceration for more than 15 months. He was arrested on 21st December 2007 for his participation in anti-government protests. For ten days he was repeatedly tortured with electric shocks, hanging from both hands and legs, and deprivation of sleep. He knows his torturers. For the following two months Mr Al Sheikh said he was held in solitary confinement and subjected to enormous physical and psychological torture. According to one human rights lawyer present at the conference the testimony was damning enough to serve a write against Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa and several of his lieutenants for crimes against humanity.

Meanwhile the streets of Bahrain are boiling. Yesterday, fires were seen on Sheikh Jaber Highway, the main road near Sitra Petrol Station and other places. The wave of illegal arrests has continued however. On 6th April, Mohammad Makki Traif, 19, from Sanabis was arrested after a dawn raid on his house spearheaded by members of the Death Squads. The day before, Taher Al Sami', 16 was taken as a hostage to force his brother to hand himself to the torturers. Imad Yaseen, 19, was also arrested. Alawi Al Sharakhat, 16, was arrested in the early hours of yesterday as he laid in bed. Many children have been seriously injured by air guns used by the Death Squads, as they took part in peaceful demonstrations.

Bahrain Freedom Movement
10th April 2009

Endless suffering for Bahrainis tortured beyond limits

The young man, Hussain Ibrahim Yaqoob, from the town of Karzakkan, could not believe that he would be so savagely treated by the Death Squads under the order of the royal court. He was one of the Bahrainis who were protesting against the Al Khalifa dictatorship two days ago when he was attacked by members of these squads and thrown on burning tyres in the street. It was a horrific scenes that shocked the passers by. It was the justice the Al Khalifa seek to inflict on Bahrainis who oppose their occupation and dictatorial rule.

The mother of another young Bahraini described the torture her son had been subjected to. Mrs Habib said that her son, Siraj Isa Habib was tortured to the extent that they did not recognise him when they visited him in the torture chambers. He had been beaten until he lost consciousness and was held in solitary confinement for two weeks. He was threatened with electric shocks if he did

not sign the "confession" they had prepared for him and his solitary confinement would be extended.

Yesterday, Abdullah Khalaf was transferred from his torture cell to the military hospital as his health deteriorated as after an emergency operation last week. The operation was carried out after he had been beaten and tortured so badly that his organs were torn apart. His father said that the condition of his son was critical after his jaws were broken when he was beaten during his arrest outside his home. He has lost sight in his right eye. He was rushed out of hospital after the operation before his wounds had healed.

The use of torture has become so wide spread that the ruler yesterday ordered the release of Maitham Al Sheikh, 28, whose health had deteriorated rapidly as a result of severe torture. He had been taken to hospital many times over the past six months but his condition continued to deteriorate. Doctors now say that he is unlikely to recover from

the various ailments that he had suffered as a result of the various forms of torture. The intense use of electric shocks administered against him has damaged his nervous system and destroyed his life. Despite repeated calls to investigate the torturers the ruler has failed to heed the calls and clung to the notorious Law 56/2002 that offers impunity to torturers. An international campaign has been launched to indict the ruler, Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa, for his role in legalising torture of Bahrainis. This is in addition to the crime of genocide that is accused of committing by an international organisation which had written to International Criminal Court (ICC). The office of the ICC Prosecutor General, Mr Moreno Ocampo, has already been contacted about this matter.

These facts have shocked the people who listened to the Al Khalifa minister of interior as he categorically denied the use of torture against Bahrainis.

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Lord Avebury at Press Conference: Paradoxes of Kingdom of silence

Press Conference on 8th April 2009

This is an unhappy time for the Kingdom of Silence we are here to discuss, and there is also silence in the western media about the escalating crisis in Bahrain. There is negative feedback between the harsh and repressive acts of the authorities, and the growing resistance of ordinary people on the streets. More people including many schoolchildren are being injured by the security forces and foreign mercenaries, and we have photographs of their injuries. More people are being detained, and many of those detained are being tortured, including the victims of the show trial of 35 who are accused of acts of terror. The main defendant Mr Hassan Mushaima has been a frequent attendant at our previous seminars, and we strongly believe the trial is an attempt to stop him engaging in political activities. The Haq movement, of which he is leader, is the main opposition to the regime, and makes no secret of the fact that it wants constitutional reform to replace the absolute monarchy by a democratic system with a genuine Parliament, independent courts of law, freedom of expression, and an end to the demographic engineering exposed by Dr Salah al-Bandar three years ago.

For upholding principles that we say we support all over the world, Mr Mushaima, and our other good friend Abdujalil al-Singace, also a regular guest here, face a trial which has been severely criticised by Human Rights Watch, and I'll come onto that in a minute. But first I want to tell you about a message I had from Dr Singace yesterday, which he was able to send as the only one of the 22 arrested who was granted bail.

A friend of his, a professor from the Hoover Institution, a well-known think tank which is part of Stanford University in the US was on a cruise ship that called in at Manama, and he invited Dr Al-Singace to lunch on board the ship with him and his academic colleagues. When Dr Al-Singace presented himself at the port, officials first said they needed an instruction in writing from the ship's captain or the travel agents to allow him on board. The travel agent then arrived, with a list of visitors that included the name of Dr Al-Singace. But he was still detained by port officials in a security room for an hour and a half, until a senior government official turned up, to announce that the Foreign Ministry had issued an instruction giving permission for only three persons to board the ship and speak to the travellers. These were a member of the ruling family who is an assistant under-secretary of the Foreign Ministry; a Mrs Allison Samaan, Deputy Head of the Shura Council, and Dr Mansoor al-Jamri, editor-in-chief of Al-Wasat newspaper, tolerated by the government because he knows what not to say on sensitive topics.

The American professor was dismayed, that his idea of asking Dr Al-Singace to speak to the visiting academics was hijacked by the regime, and turned into a circus to polish their image. The professor learned, by hints dropped in his discussions with officials, that Dr Al-Singace was not to be allowed to speak to the visitors for political reasons, but none of them had the guts to come out and say so plainly. So finally, the professor gave up the idea of having lunch on board as had been agreed with the tour organisers and the ship's agent and decided to come on shore for lunch with Dr Al-Singace

At the end of last year, the state-controlled TV screened a group of young opposition activists who had been held incommunicado for 11 days confessing to acts of violence at a Haq rally. They said that Mr Mushaima had told them to do this, as part of a plot to overthrow the government, but when they first came to court on February 23, their lawyer said they had been tortured. They said they had been beaten with water hoses on their feet, and given electric shocks, especially on their genitals, and I have asked her whether she has submitted a formal complaint to the UN Rapporteur on Torture, Manfred Nowak.

At the last hearing on March 25, the court unprecedentedly agreed to reinvestigate the case, to order an end to the solitary confinement of the defendants, and to appoint a medical committee to investigate the torture allegations. The presence in the court of representatives of the EU Presidency, as well as numerous human rights NGOs such as Human Rights Watch and the Islamic Human Rights Commission, may have had some bearing on this outcome, and I suggest this meeting ask the EU Presidency to attend the resumed hearing on April 28.

But this trial, though it is indeed an iniquitous act of persecution against those who stand up for human rights in Bahrain, is only one aspect of the increasing ruthlessness of the hereditary dictatorship. Seeing that the population has lost patience waiting for the reforms that never came after a controlled Parliament with no real power was established, the al-Khalifas have clamped down on every expression of dissent, using violence on the streets, blocking access to human rights websites, and spying on members of the opposition. Even the US, Bahrain's staunch ally, has to criticise the regime in the State Department's report on human rights. They say that in 2008

Citizens did not have the right to change their government. The government restricted civil liberties, including freedoms of press, speech, assembly, association and some religious practices. Domestic violence against women persisted, as did

discrimination on the basis of gender, religion, nationality, and sect, particularly against the Shia majority population.

This report already detailed mass arrests of demonstrators and their allegations of torture from the whole 12 months, and defects in the court system. The king appoints all judges by royal decree, and he is chairman of the Supreme Judicial Council which supervises the work of the courts and public prosecutors. There is no right of access by defendants to evidence held by the government

What can we do to persuade our own Government to be as plain as that, instead of being so careful to avoid commenting on human rights violations in Bahrain, as they have been ever since the Parliamentary Human Rights Group first took up the problems in the early 90s?

Endless suffering of tortured Bahrainis

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Yet he and his bosses have refused to investigate then hundreds of cases of detainees whose injuries are damning evidence against him and his ruthless regime. Several websites have published video evidence to counter his lies. Mothers described the mutilated bodies of their children languishing behind bars in the worst of conditions. Doctors speak of the shocks of their lives as they treat Bahraini victims of torture.

The public anger is now taking new dimensions as the people attempt to vent their anger through demonstrations, pickets and writing slogans on the walls. Demonstrations have continued in the past few days. In Sitra, a large demonstration took to the streets yesterday calling for the immediate release of the political of conscience especially Mr Hassan Mushaima. Youth rushed to paint their slogans on the walls as a symbolic gesture in defiance of the ruthless police. Another demonstration took to the streets in Sanabis but was attacked by the foreign-staffed riot police and members of the Death Squads. Men and women were attacked mercilessly by those mercenaries, several of whom were injured. The people of Abu Saibe' also demonstrated yesterday but were attacked and dispersed. Meanwhile the BBC has broadcast images of these attacks including the use of live ammunition against unarmed demonstrators.

Bahrain Freedom Movement

3rd April 2009