

BAHRAIN

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Remove diplomatic immunity of Bahrain's Ambassador and former torturer

The issue of torture has plagued reformists and civil societies for centuries and remains a source of anxiety among activists and civil rights activists throughout the world. Despite the multitude of international legislations criminalising the use of torture it remains the main tool in the hands of government agents against opponents. When the world celebrated the International Day Against Torture on 26th June, the public enthusiasm for the event was lukewarm. It appears that modern societies and media have yet to make combating torture a priority. There may have been gatherings, speeches or statements by human rights bodies, but as long as torturers continue to roam through the towns and villages of beleaguered societies people will remain vigilant against appearing to campaign for human, civil or political rights. The UN Convention Against Torture (CAT) was legislated to criminalise the use of this cruel treatment, but the lack of real will within the international community to stand up against those who commit this crime has rendered it largely ineffective.

Bahrain, for example, had signed CAT in 1998, few months after the murder of Nooh Khalil Al Nooh by members of the Al Khalifa Death Squads. They had him for two days before they dumped his mutilated body at the steps of his house. It was a message for the activists who continued to defy the hereditary dictatorship ruling the country by force and intimidation. The horrific scenes reflected by the mutilated body of Nooh compelled the regime to put its signature on CAT. It had, however, refused to sign the additional protocol that allows torture victims to take their cases to international bodies. It is now ten years since CAT was signed, but torture is rampant in police cells. The bodies who have recently been released from detention have clear evidence of severe torture; physical, sexual as well as psychological. Where is CAT then? The regime would always maintain its innocence and deny that its interrogators would administer torture on the prisoners. But the Bahraini victims were courageous enough to lash out at the kangaroo court room when they appeared last March. One after the other, they detailed the horrific torture inflicted on them to force them to sign uncorroborated testimonies prepared by the officials at the ministry of the interior. The

court room suddenly became a trial of the Al Khalifa torturers. The presence of foreign lawyers invited by the opposition exposed the brutality of the regime to the outside world for the first time. The court session was brought to an abrupt end. A decision was subsequently taken to abandon the show trials that were beginning to go against the wishes of the regime.

The story of torture in Bahrain is relatively new. It was institutionalised by the notorious British colonial officer, Ian Henderson, who had previously served in Kenya and was key figure in torturing the Mau Mau insurgents. Eight of them are now suing the British government in London for their ill-treatment at the peak of the insurgency in the fifties. Ian Henderson is one of those involved in the maltreatment of the Mau Mau. When he was employed by Sir Anthony Parsons (the British Political Agent in Bahrain) in 1966 he brought with him a life-long experience in torture and ill-treatment of prisoners. He established one of the most ruthless torture apparatus in the Middle East. The following four decades witnessed thousands of innocent Bahrainis being driven into the torture chambers, many of whom were subsequently came out mutilated corpses. When he retired in 2000 his legacy survived intact. The person who succeeded him was no other person than the notorious torturer, Abdul Azia Atiyat Allah Al Khalifa who re-introduced torture after a brief lull. Atiyat Allah stands accused of gross violations of human rights at grand scales, having served for more than two decades under Henderson. He was directly implicated in personally administering torture against scores of detainees. When the uproar against him intensified, he was swiftly removed from leading the Al Khalifa security apparatus and installed as an "advisor" to the ruler on security matters.

The appointment of a successor did not prove a consolation to those seeking to rid the country of this evil practice. Rashid bin Abdullah Al Khalifa adopted similar ruthlessness in dealing with the opponents of the Al Khalifa occupiers. In December 2007 he allowed the extensive torture of several people including Maitham Al Shaikh, Hassan Abdul Nabi and Naji

Fateel. This cruel treatment led the first of these victims to develop Multiple Sclerosis and is now bed-ridden. Rashid Al Khalifa was later dispatched to London to become the Ambassador to UK, while the former Ambassador, Khalifa bin Abdulla Al Khalifa, became the director of national security. Despite his sweet mutterings, he proved to be no less evil than his predecessors. Over the past twelve months, more than one hundred Bahrainis were tortured by the torture apparatus run by Khalifa bin Abdulla, the former Ambassador in London. Questions are now being asked whether the UK is the training grounds for torturers. Almost all the torturers had, in one way or another, links with London. Atiyat Allah, Khalid Al Ma'awdah and Abdul Salam Al Ansari, had been trained in the late sixties at the Police Academy at Hendon. Is it plausible to allow torturers to run embassies? How can the civilised world accept these evil men to be treated as diplomats with special immunity? What is the difference, in real terms, between the impunity granted to torturers granted by the notorious Law 56/2002 decreed by the ruler and the immunity offered to the torturers under the diplomatic pretext?

As the world celebrated the International Day Against Torture questions are being asked whether the "civilised" world is morally civilised when it shelters torturers and human rights violators. What is the difference between a torturer like the Al Khalifa Ambassador who terrorise innocent people behind bars and those who commit the heinous crimes of terrorism against innocent civilians? There ought to be a clear and unambiguous message that torture cannot be tolerated when committed by anyone, and that diplomatic immunity may not be granted to former torturers. The success or failure of our civil society depends on whether the government takes serious steps to outlaw torture by pursuing those who had been torturers. The recent experience has proven, once again, that present diplomats of dictatorial regimes, may run torture apparatus. This is what last year's Bahrain's Ambassador to Bahrain is doing now. The testimonies of his victims prove beyond any reasonable doubt that he is a torturer of the highest calibre.

US pressure sought as Death Squads continue their abductions

Another Bahraini was kidnapped by the Death Squads, tortured and then released. Ibrahim Yousuf Ibrahim Dhaif, from the village of Demstan was walking with his friends when a car pulled beside them. His friends managed to escape but he was captured, beaten up ferociously and thrown in the street. His friends hurried to tell his family who came and took him to the Accident and Emergency wing of Salmaniya hospital. His family members were then prevented from coming to his side. His brother said that Death Squads members warned them not to do so.

Mr Dhaif is the latest victim in a series of attacks against Bahrainis by the Death Squads run and managed by Khalid bin Ahmad Al Khalifa, the minister of the royal court. Among the most notorious of these cases is that of Jaffar Kadhem who was viciously beaten by the same militias last month. He was left for dead but was hurried to hospital where he spent two weeks before regaining his strength to walk.

Instead of heeding the call to stop these attacks against Bahrainis, Rashid bin Abdullah Al Khalifa, the minister of the interior has warned that more such attacks are in the pipeline against those whom he terms as "saboteurs" and "terrorists" who insist on exercising their right to protest and express their opinion. Freedom of expression has been crushed in the past

few years to the extent that possessing anti-regime leaflet amounts to terrorism punished by life imprisonment or even death, according to the terrorism law imposed by the ruling family and rubber stamped by its shura council. He urged citizens to work as spies for the Al Khalifa occupiers by reporting anyone taking part in "illegal" activity such as demonstrations or writing on the walls. This is yet another escalation in the barbarity of the Al Khalifa in their treatment of Bahrainis.

As the public uproar continues in light of the recent legislation regarding the retirement salaries of the members of the Al Khalifa parliament, it has been revealed that the total cost of this illegal theft will cost the country more than two and half million dollars annually. The ruling family has sought to implicate members of its various councils in its robbery of Bahrain. While the low paid Bahrainis receive less than 400 dollars a month, the rulers and their accomplices are treating themselves to lavish lifestyles that no native can dream of. The public sentiment at this institutionalised robbery is growing and could lead to explosion of public anger.

Another case of the gross violation of human rights is the continued detention, torture and likely indictment of Ali Hassan Salman who is falsely accused of making public the names of some torturers. He was arrested a month ago, interrogated and

tortured but not yet charged with a specific punishable offence. Lawyers have argued that even if the names he had made public were true, that does not constitute a crime because it does not lead to any violence or compromise the interest of the citizens. This comes at a time when the torturers roam the country without fear of prosecution. It has been reported that the notorious torturer, Adel Flaifel, will stand for "elections" to become a member of the Al Khalifa powerless shura council. It is one of the most audacious acts against the feelings and pride of Bahrainis as he stands accused of torturing hundreds of citizens over a span of a quarter of a century. The opposition has boycotted the Al Khalifa constitution and any activity or body based on it.

In the Norwegian capital, Oslo, tens of civil society organisations signed a petition condemning the Al Khalifa's policy against the freedom of expression. They were meeting within the framework of International Network to exchange information about freedom of expression and the International Forum for Freedom of Expression. Forty of these bodies signed an open letter asking the authorities in Bahrain to stop attacks on people's right to express their opinion freely.

Bahrain Freedom Movement
19 June 2009

40 international bodies condemn attacks on freedom of expression

The past few days have witnessed more disturbances in several places, an indication of the failure of the ruling family to silence the people of Bahrain who demand serious political reforms. On Tuesday Death Squads roamed the roads of Bilad Al Qadeem, on the outskirts of Manama. They emerged from their heavily-armoured carrier near Al Khamis roundabout, brandished their guns and induced terror in the hearts of the school children who were leaving school. They caused serious traffic jams during a period of intense car movements. The Al Zawraa restaurant was besieged for a while. No clear motive for this vicious attack was known, except to show that the ruling family was serious in its bloody attacks against Bahrainis.

The protests against the continued detention of Bahrainis for their political views have continued in several places. Earlier in the week protesters in Karzakkan burnt tyres in the main road to prevent Death Squads from storming the town. The people continued to demand the release of their children who are languishing in torture chambers. The Death Squads soon arrived and waged vicious attacks on the youth.

Meanwhile the attacks against citizens have continued. The protests continued for at least two consecutive nights.

A young Bahraini, Muhannad Marhoon, was arrested at the cause linking Bahrain and Saudi Arabia as he was returning with his father and uncle. Three hours later, the Death Squads stormed his house in a provocative way. They left after terrorising the youth and his family.

A similar raid was launched at 2.00 pm Tuesday against the house of Sayyed Aqeel Al mousawi in the village of Sar. The aggression was waged by Death Squads supported by the foreign-staffed riot police. The house was ransacked, its contents scattered on the floor and its occupants terrorised. The elderly mother of Sayyed Aqeel was harassed beyond belief. Sayyed Hassan Al Mousawi, the brother of Sayyed Aqeel was arrested for protesting against the barbaric attack on his family. Sayyed Aqeel is an outspoken critic of the Al Khalifa occupiers and has been subjected to various forms of intimidations. The ruling family went as far as fabricating stories to defame his character as it has done with many others. The Al Khalifa have now realised the futility of mass arrests, torture and incarcerations as they have led to international outcry and castigated their regime as a human rights violator. They now have resorted to political assassination of the activists characters. Many unfounded allegations have been made in recent months against activists including accusations of sexual

misbehaviour. None of these allegations have ever been substantiated. In the words of a legal expert: "What the Al Khalifa are doing is the worst form of exploiting the full weight of state powers against powerless individuals in these shameful ways"

On another level, forty local, regional and international organisations have protested against the attacks by the Al Khalifa against free expression in Bahrain. They signed a petition in which they said: "Authorities have waged a campaign against free expression, prosecuting writers, journalists and bloggers for practicing their profession, and preventing human rights defenders, activists and dissidents from addressing the public through media, internet and other fora. Moreover, the authorities have led defamation campaigns, through its controlled media, against activists and human rights defenders who express their dissenting views and openly discuss public affairs." Since the present minister of information, Mai Al Khalifa, took her post last year, the attacks on freedom of expression have intensified. By the end of last years, Bahrain's jails became crowded as scores of activists were detained and tortured for their peaceful expression of opinion.

Bahrain Freedom Movement
4th June 2009

Bahrain business is doomed as political crisis and instability continue

While Bahrain is well located for business, tourism and culture, the dictatorial rule of the Al Khalifa family has led to its doom as a strategically-located for regional and international business. Before this tribe, who had been engaged in piracy, invaded these islands, Bahrain had been the hub for international dealers in natural pearls. Rulers of other countries had spent holidays among its tropical rainforests, fresh water springs, date palm orchards and its crystal clear sea shores. Gone are the good old days. The country now suffers from any natural fresh water sources; coral reefs have been totally destroyed as a result of the ill-advised policies of sea reclamation to provide more land for the ever-hungry appetite of the sheikhs and princes and the massive fruit and vegetable fields have all but disappeared. Bahrain has lost to Qatar and Dubai as a major business centre in the Gulf region. Many businesses have left in recent years as the extent of corruption by the ruling family was exposed.

What makes the situation even worse is the ongoing political strife that has engulfed the country for the past thirty years. Political prisoners are languishing behind bars on the orders of the self-styled "king" who acts as one of the worst military dictators in the world. He

is surrounded by an army of lieutenants who have no regard to human lives, public freedoms or political openness. The royal palace runs a large number of Death Squads who act outside the law, killing political and human rights activists in the streets, the latest of their victims is Moosa Jaffar Mulla Khalil whose car was booby trapped by these evil agents. Their victims include Ali Jassim, Abbas Al Shakhouri, Mahdi Abdul Rahman, Mohammad Jum'a Al Shakhouri and Khalil Nooh Al Nooh. All were subjected to extra-judicial killings. None of their killers had been brought to justice, and no independent inquiries have ever been set up.

Bahrain is a country in crisis. The hereditary dictatorship has failed every opportunity to reconcile with the natives, both Shia and Sunni, and insisted on ruling Bahrain with the mentality of military occupation. Members of the Al Khalifa occupy most of the senior political and managerial positions. Out of 28 cabinet posts, 17 are occupied to them. The seminar that is being held now at the Hilton Hotel is chaired by one of their members, Daij Al Khalifa. He is the imposed chairman of the General Organisation of Sea Ports. The same happens in almost every official body from ministries to directorates or agencies. Bahrain is swamped by the Al Khalifa occupiers who have lived in seclusion from the

natives. Bahrainis are now the underdogs of the country especially in light of the political naturalisation programme imposed by the ruler.

The policies of the Al Khalifa occupiers have been condemned by the international bodies including Human Rights Watch, Article 19, Front Line Defenders and others. The recent comments by senior politicians, such as Bill Rammell, the UK's Minister of State, about the treatment of political prisoners especially those who had been paraded on TV screens, have exposed the extent of violations of human rights by the Al Khalifa occupiers.

You are requested to support the struggle of the people of Bahrain against these occupiers who have plundered the wealth and land of Bahrain and subjected the natives to horrific tales of abuse, enslavement and terror. Please add your voice to those who call for the unconditional release of political prisoners, a stop to the political naturalisation programme that aims at changing the demographic balance in the country and the drawing up of a democratic constitution to be drafted by the people. Your support is vital to struggle to end oppression and establish justice in Bahrain.

Bahrain Freedom Movement

12 June 2009

Al Khalifa recruit mercenaries from Makran, Pakistan to suppress Bahrainis

The Bahrain Government's use of foreign mercenaries to oppress Bahraini people with legitimate demands and grievances leads to a growing hostility towards foreigners, said the Bahrain Center for Human Rights (BCHR).

BCHR expresses its deep concern and dismay regarding the news received from Baluchistan Province in Pakistan regarding the presence of a Bahraini security delegation in the Pakistani town of Makran. The security delegation is said to be working to recruit men from this city, who belong to the Baluch tribes in Pakistan, to work as mercenaries in the Bahraini security services.

In his statement to News Online, Mr. Basham Baluch - Official spokesman for the Baluch Liberation Front (BLF) - appealed to the Baluchi people, saying, "The Bahraini army is currently recruiting members of the Makran area in Baluchistan. Under the current circumstances, we call upon the Baluchi nation not to become part of any tyrant or oppressive army, at a time when the Baluchi nation is living in a state of war and is going through a critical period. Instead of turning the young Baluchistanis into hired killers, they should join the national armies (Baluch Liberation Front, Baluchistani Liberation Army, the

Baluch Republican Army (BLA)), to make the independence of their homeland a reality." He added, "We warn all these institutions and demand that they put an immediate end to the recruitment process in Makran area. We are in a status of war, and are struggling against the tyrants ourselves, and we do not want the Baluch people to be used and turned into mercenaries." The Baluch Liberation Front (BLF) has people's support among the Baluch in Pakistan and the rest of the Gulf countries, and is engaged in a resistance to separate their province from Pakistan.

The Bahrain Center for Human Rights believes that the recruitment taking place in Makran aims to bring in more Baluch soldiers to join the Bahraini National Guard as well as the Special Forces that belong to the National Security apparatus. Both of these groups are made up of mostly foreign mercenaries, and used to suppress local movements petitioning for greater rights. Based on the above, the Bahrain Center for Human Rights renews its demands for the following:

1. To put an end to the policy of bringing and using foreign mercenaries to work for the security services and Special Forces to confront the peaceful public protests and local movements for greater civil and human rights

2. To dissolve the National Security apparatus and the Special Security Forces and to return their powers to the regular security institutions.

3. To end the decree of laws that violate rights, institutions and practices which restrict and suppress public liberties, and to guarantee and maintain civil and political rights and public freedoms, especially those related to expression, peaceful gathering and organization.

4. To end the continuous violations, pursuits, and abductions of human rights defenders and political activists, and to guarantee a healthy and appropriate environment for the work of the human rights organizations and civil institutions away from constraining regulations, interference and threats of the security services.

5. The members of the parliament should work on drafting laws that criminalize recruiting of mercenaries and should question those responsible for the security institutions for all the violations, and which includes recruiting and using mercenaries for internal disputes.

6. To initiate genuine reconciliation between the ruling elite and all the people of Bahrain and to pave the way for true reforms where the government does not need to use foreigners against citizens.

U.S. Navy Fleet's Mideast Home Is Facing Rise in Sectarian Strife

Wall Street Journal

By YAROSLAV TROFIMOV JUNE 20, 2009

MADINAT HAMAD, Bahrain -- On a recent evening, Issa al Jibb climbed the roof of his home and started hurling Molotov cocktails into the adjoining property of the Rawi clan. By the time Bahraini police shot him down with a rubber bullet, Mr. Jibb had managed to burn three cars and part of the building, and inflicted serious burns on two Rawi teenagers.

This was no ordinary feud among neighbors. Mr. Jibb, 46 years old, is a native of this small Persian Gulf kingdom. The Rawis are originally from Syria, were recruited along with thousands of other Arabs and Pakistanis to serve in Bahrain's security forces and eventually rewarded with Bahraini citizenship for their loyalty to the crown.

Hostility between these two communities is on the rise, with several other clashes, car torchings and beatings reported in recent months. "Bahrainis think that we just don't belong, that we're aliens to this area and to this state," says a Syrian-born army officer who lives nearby.

Yaroslav Trofimov/The Wall Street Journal

Freih al Rawi, originally from Syria, is one of the thousands recruited to Bahrain to serve in its security forces in exchange for citizenship there.

Once hailed for its democratic reforms, Bahrain -- a strategic island-state that serves as headquarters of the U.S. Navy Fifth Fleet -- is increasingly rocked by sectarian and ethnic strife. Though the majority of Bahrain's 530,000 citizens are Shiites, power remains in the hands of a Sunni royal family, the only such minority regime in the Arab world since the downfall of Saddam Hussein in Iraq. Suspecting its Shiite citizens of loyalty to nearby Iran, the island's former master, Bahrain's royal family has long relied on Sunni mercenaries from countries such as Syria, Jordan, Yemen and Pakistan to staff Bahrain's army, police and security service.

Earlier this decade, as Washington pushed for democratization in the region, Bahrain's King Hamad freed political prisoners and established an elected parliament with limited powers. However, opposition leaders and some independent analysts charge, a parallel program began at the same time, largely ignored by Western nations that depend on Bahrain's valuable naval facilities. The regime, they say, has sharply accelerated its policy of naturalizing Sunni mercenaries, aiming to inflate the size of the Sunni electorate -- and to defuse Iran's growing influence.

"There seems to be a clear political strategy to alter the country's demographic balance in order to counter the Shiite voting power," says Toby C. Jones, professor of

Middle East studies at Rutgers University and a former Bahrain-based analyst at the International Crisis Group think tank. "This naturalization stuff is a time bomb."

Bahraini officials deny any such policy exists, and insist there is no discrimination against the country's Shiites. According to Bahrain's interior minister, Sheik Rashid bin Abdullah al Khalifa, only about 7,000 people were naturalized in the past five years. Opposition politicians, however, calculate the naturalization's true pace at some 10,000 people a year, based on voter registration statistics -- a big number in such a small country.

People picked for this naturalization "aren't just Sunnis," but religious fundamentalists "who share the hatred of the Shiites," asserts Hassan Mushaima, leader of Bahrain's Haq Shiite movement who was imprisoned for three months this year for his role in violent street protests.

Not just Bahraini Shiites oppose the naturalization. Initially, the island's Sunnis welcomed fellow Sunni newcomers, says Ebrahim Sharif Alsayed, secretary-general of the Waad secularist movement and a Sunni himself. "But today, most Sunnis are strongly against the naturalization," he says. "It's not about balancing the Shiites anymore -- it's about protecting the indigenous Sunni population from being invaded by foreigners."

Mr. Jibb, the Bahraini who threw Molotov cocktails into his neighbors' home in

Madinat Hamad last month, is a Sunni, too. The conflict began in December, when Mr. Jibb witnessed the beating of a Bahraini neighbor by the Rawis and other naturalized Syrians, according to his sister Leila. "The Syrians, they're like a gang trying to control the whole area, bullying the whole street just to show who's the boss," she says.

A few days later, the Rawis attacked Mr. Jibb with a hammer blow on the head, prompting a hospitalization, she says. Members of the Rawi household, headed by retired Bahraini army sergeant Freih al Rawi, and comprising some 40 people, deny they instigated the clash. "We know; there's bad feeling for foreign people here," says one of Mr. Rawi's sons, an army officer.

The night of May 29, Ms. Jibb says, her brother -- who suffered psychiatric problems after the December hammer blow to the head -- found himself the target of taunts by the Rawis again, and simply "lost his mind," unleashing the volley of Molotov cocktails. Ms. Jibb has since fled her house, fearing revenge from the Syrian-born neighbors. "How can it be?" she wondered indignantly. "I, a pure Bahraini lady, am now homeless in my own country!"

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Bahrainis took part in a protest on Friday 26th June against the continued detention and torture of political activists, to mark the International Day Against Torture.