

# BAHRAIN

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

## Freedom House classifies Bahrain as "Not Free"

The "Freedom House" classification that Bahrain is categorized within the "Not Free" countries has shaken the Al Khalifa establishment to its core. For more than a decade they have worked relentlessly to promote themselves as "democrats" with the help of their allies in Washington and London. They have employed every possible tactic of presenting this image to counter the efforts by Bahrainis who have warned the world against the deception by the Al Khalifa hereditary dictatorship. It took this reputable body a decade to reach the conclusion that Bahrain is a large prison within which native Bahrainis had been caged for decades. To make the matters worse, Sheikh Hamad had monopolized the oil revenues to the full, using chunks of them to buy off politicians, journalists and lobbyists to promote a false image of a "constitutional monarchy". Many in the world have fallen in this web of deceit, after witnessing that the country under the present ruler has "a constitution", "elections" and "parliament". Only few of them, however, have investigated the reality in today's Bahrain. With oil revenues, securely held by the ruler and his close lieutenants, money has played major part in the building this web. It took the Bahraini opposition a full decade, during which they gave big sacrifices, to start reaping some fruits. It is hoped that the world has woken up to the ugly reality in a country held hostage by occupiers, torturers and despots.

The conclusion arrived at by Freedom House is the natural one. Other international bodies should have reached a similar conclusion sooner, but the policies of spin and deception have contributed to the delay in the exposure of the murderous regime in this tiny country of the Gulf. Several facts have been known for some time; which would have altered the outside perception of the reality inside. First, the country is ruled by a constitution hand-crafted to suit the Al Khalifa agenda while denying Bahrainis the right for political participation or power sharing. For almost 35 years, the opposition has lobbied for a contractual constitution to be written by Bahrainis. That single demand has remained a mirage since the abolition of the 1973 constitution by the present ruler. A

constitution is meant to represent the will of the people and how power-sharing among them is implemented. That right has been denied by the Al Khalifa. Sheikh Hamad's constitution has been rejected by the people, not withstanding its approval by a tiny minority. For any impartial observer, the constitution could not be considered legitimate without being written by the people or approved by them in an open referendum.

Then comes the issue of genocide; a policy central to the Al Khalifa political programme. Through political naturalization process, the composition of the Bahraini society has been fundamentally altered amid unheard cries and warnings. No democracy may exist alongside genocide. Bahrainis demand not only an immediate hold to the political naturalization process but to hold the perpetrators of genocide, headed by the ruler himself, to account at an international tribunal under the protocols of the International Criminal Court. With them, torturers must also be held responsible for the ordeals suffered by the thousands of victims who had been ill-treated in torture chambers. Freedom House must be aware of the existence of the notorious Law 56 that grants impunity to torturers. The ruler has guaranteed the safety from prosecution of his torturers. Some of these criminals have been promoted by the ruler into ministerial positions. As for the "democratic process" itself, the ruler has defended his uncle in the position of Prime Minister for forty un-interrupted years. Is it this democracy? To add salt to the injury, Sheikh Hamad has appointed 17 of his close family associates in the 28 members cabinet. The Al Khalifa-style democracy has defied logic and modern principles and values in its details and forced the world to acknowledge a severe form of dictatorship as Democracy!

To continue safeguarding the regime, the appointed half of the shura council has recently approved a new law to execute those who inform the outside world about the Al Khalifa atrocities. Human rights activists will be the main offender under this draconian law and will thus be eligible for execution. The regime had

preceded with an order to form an official human rights body to hail its achievements. The second target is the victims of torture who may talk to international human rights bodies and seek justice against their torturers. It is widely known that the ruler himself is a possible future suspect in the case of genocide against Bahrainis. He hopes that the new law will silence the victims and prevent any evidence against his criminal policies leaking to the outside world. Killing Bahrainis for speaking to the outside world about their predicament is itself a crime of great magnitude. Freedom House must be aware of these repressive laws and rules and their experience with tyrannical regimes has led them to conclude that Bahrain could not be a free country under these draconian rules. To them, elections in themselves do not constitute democracy. They differentiate between the "right" and "the Law". They may or may not be compatible. The "Right" is the reference, while the "Law" must be scrutinized to see if it leads to justice and right. The Al Khalifa have written "laws" but they have ignored "justice". This is why Bahrain is "not a free country" according to the Freedom House indicator. It now remains for the military ruler of Bahrain to decide his next move, having witnessed the utter failure of his policies and the disrepute he has brought onto himself and his family. The Bahrainis will, nevertheless, pursue their civil resistance programme regardless of the oppression of the regime. The daily demonstrations and protests have inevitably led to the exposure of the true nature of the Al Khalifa. This is a satisfactory conclusion of a phase struggle that has been carried out against all the odds including the employment of the state's resources to crush the will of the natives. The Freedom House report will be supplemented by major human rights reports to be published soon. Only then a clearer picture will emerge of the dark side of the Al Khalifa rhetoric. It may be too late to save this antiquated regime who had failed to take up the opportunity that the Bahrainis had offered him with good hearts and noble intentions. Time may prove that the Al Khalifa are not worthy of the trust of the Bahrainis.

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## Bahrain lives a Day of Fury as repression intensifies

Saturday 16<sup>th</sup> January will be remembered as one of the days of public fury, as Bahrainis adopted their methods of civil disobedience to express outrage against the Al Khalifa occupiers. Scores of youth braved the persistent repression of the army of mercenaries, went out to the streets, shouted anti-regime slogans and barricaded themselves behind columns of fires to avoid the aggression of the foreign-staffed riot police. Their fury was made worse by the Al Khalifa attacks on their religious symbols, congregation halls and banners. The mixture of political and religious repression being implemented by the Al Khalifa occupiers has aggravated the situation and forced Bahrainis to cry for help from the international community against the Al Khalifa junta.

First came the unprovoked attacks yesterday on mosques and Hussaini halls in Karzakkan in which the black banners were torn and the mosque was ransacked. Then came the people's reaction to those crimes in the form of protests extending to most towns and villages of the country. In Duraz the youth went out to the streets in protest against the detention last week of four young men from the town. They are: Abbas Hassan Al Nama, 23, Jalal Hassa Al Nama, 20, Hassan Kadhem Hassan, 22 and Jaffar Mohammad Habib, 19. What made their arrest even more painful is the extent of torture they received during their arrest although they presented no resistance. They were beaten so severely that blood covered their clothes. It was a fla-

grant show of state terrorism. The protests by the youth started from midnight Saturday and lasted two hours during which the riot police and Death Squads raided houses and attacked women and children. The youth of the town of Ma'amir started their protests at 2.30 AM Saturday and continued for almost an hour. At 2.00 AM the people of Muharraq went out in protest against the continued detention of Bahrainis. In the afternoon, other towns and villages joined the protest. In Sanabis fires were raging in several spots. The youth of Daih and Southern Sihla burnt tyres and bins in the main road. Death Squads rushed to the scenes and distinguished the fires. The people of Sanabis went out again after 7.00 pm burning tyres and bins. The road joining the main Budayya Road was closed until the fires were extinguished. Death Squads then started their frenzied attack on the people of these areas. More towns and villages then joined in the protests. The people of Karrana, Duraz, Karzakkan, Karbabad, Aali, Bilad Al Qadim, JidHafs and Daih took part in more protests to support their brothers in other areas. The situation was temporarily brought under the control of the occupiers only after special forces and soldiers were deployed in most areas. They used large amounts of chemical and tear gases, rubber bullets and other tools of repression against Bahrainis. Many Bahrainis suffered attacks of breathlessness and physical injuries. Some needed hospital treatment. The public outrage is unlikely to go

away as long as the political prisoners remain behind bars and the country is run by a regime of occupation and aggression. Last night, the houses of Marwazan and Sanabis were attacked with more chemical and tear gases.

The Al Khalifa occupiers have maintained an iron fist policy against Bahrainis who have suffered immensely for decades under a regime that insists on ruling them with the mentality of occupation. Few days ago two human rights activists on a discreet visit to the country to assess the extent of the human rights abuses were severely reprimanded by undercover agents of the much revered security apparatus. They were meeting a senior human rights activist in the lobby of a hotel. He was under surveillance for his work to expose those abuses and has thus become a target for the ruling junta. The two men, believed to be from Front Line (which defends human rights activists) were talking to Nabil Rajab, the President of the Bahrain Centre for Human Rights when they were approached by several members of the Death Squads. They were threatened and received verbal abuse for not contacting the torture apparatus to "arrange" who they should meet about human rights situation in Bahrain. There is mounting fear for the safety of activists such as Nabil Rajab and other political figures who have refused to acquiesce in the policies of occupation being implemented by the ruler and his clique.

**Bahrain Freedom Movement**  
17<sup>th</sup> January 2010

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## Al Khalifa tortured Bahraini youth beyond any human sense

A young Bahraini is fighting for his life after he was viciously tortured in Al Khalifa cells. Ali Ibrahim Ahmad, Al Salmabadi, 18, is in coma and his health is deteriorating rapidly following repeated attacks with electric shocks by the torturers under direct instructions from the royal court. Loud cries have been made for international intervention to save the Bahrainis from the Al Khalifa occupiers who have, apparently, taken the decision to continue the liquidation of any activist from the natives. Ali was arrested on 18<sup>th</sup> November with a false accusation. Under torture he was forced to signed false confessions that he had taken part in the burning of a tent occupied by extremist elements. He did not suffer any illness prior to his torture ordeal. When he approached death he was released to avoid death in the torture chambers. On the day of his release he was admitted to the intensive care unit. It is reported that his brain and lungs have stopped functioning and is being kept alive by machines. His family has expressed fear of retribution if the case of their son is made public. His doctors said that they had done all they could but that his condition remained critical.

In another development, the royal court has ordered attacks against houses of Bahrainis in a new wave of terror intended to frighten them into total submission to the policies of the occupiers. On 3<sup>rd</sup> January, the town of Dair was subjected to horrific attacks by the foreign-staffed riot police and Death Squads. They stormed houses using heavy machine guns, tear and chemical gases and rubber bullets. Several people were injured, including a 13 years old girl whose images have caused an uproar and protests against the Al Khalifa occupiers. She was taken to Salmaniya Hospital for treatment to serious injuries to the face and feet.

A peaceful demonstration in Sanabis by women protesting the use of force to remove the black banners during the Ashura season was attacked by riot police and Death Squads. Despite numerous calls for investigation the ruling family has refused to do so. Bahrainis have viewed this aggression as yet another material evidence that what had started as a political conflict has now become an all-out war by the occupiers against the natives who are being intimidated on daily basis especially on matters of faith and rituals. The black banners raised during the Ashura season in Sanabis, Jidhafs and Daih were targeted by the merce-

naries, abused and torn. On 2<sup>nd</sup> January the women went out to protest these policies but were attacked near the Sanabis graveyard. Rubber bullets were used along with sound bombs, tear gas and other forms of repression. Several of the participants were injured. The youth who were playing at Sanabis football pitch were also targeted. The Al Khalifa occupiers had also targeted the Hussaini banners in Sanad, Karbabad, Maqsha', Musalla, Ma'amir, Barbar, Samahij, Jufair, Jannoussan, QI Qurayya, Karzakkan, Malkiyaa, Sadad and Duraz. This aggression has been viewed as a declaration of war against the natives who have commemorated Ashura centuries before the notorious and hated occupation. Religious scholars and seminaries have condemned this flagrant attack against the natives. The ruler has refused to charge any of his mercenaries with causing social discord that could herald countrywide protests.

In the face of increasing protests, the prime minister appears to have climbed down from a planned increase in the prices of fuel, intended to hit hard those with low income. He has told members of the ineffective shura council that he would freeze

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# Bahrain's women: Victims of political agenda and propaganda

The Bahraini Authorities stepped up the political propaganda built on the exploitation of women for promotional purposes, without a real evolution of women's legal, civil, political, economical, social or cultural rights.

While authorities are promoting the involvement of women in the political scene and presenting the program as a proof of progress and reforms, in reality, the program is limited in practice by employing a limited number of women in high positions selected on the basis of political and sectarian affiliation, and not on sound career qualifications, a process which discriminates against thousands of qualified women due to their gender, sectarian and tribal affiliation. As for participation in the democratic process, the government is over-promoting training programs that aims at preparing tens of women to participate in the municipality and parliamentary elections. However in reality, the councils do not have real power, and the election of women or men to these councils does not entitle them to effective decision making capabilities, a function which continues to be controlled by the ruling elite from outside these councils.

In terms of social and economical rights, Bahraini women suffer from a decline in living standards, especially in the case of women with lower educational qualifications which are obliged to accept low-paid jobs. Other women were deprived from social protection, such as divorcees, widows, abandoned women, and orphans, forcing them into prostitution under the watch of authorities. Yet others reverted to demining jobs and work as house maids, which weakens the family structure and ultimately forces the children into delinquent behavior. In fact, the prevalence of human trafficking crimes coupled with the authorities' complacency in combating these crimes, contributed to the spread of such social disorders in the society.

At a time when the voices are raising in support of (and against) the issuance of a family law that protects families and underprivileged women (divorcees, widows and orphans) from the grasp of certain members of the society, and from the corrupted, mismanaged and incompetent Sharia Court judges, the Authorities, lead by the Royal Court, continue to exploit the issue of the law as a pressure tool to achieve political agenda and blackmail the religious forces in the country, without consideration for the lives of hundreds of women and children suffering as a result. This occurs as the ruling party continues to appoint judges in the Sharia Courts

on the basis of their political affiliation rather than competence and integrity.

Various civil society organizations are playing a vital role in defending women's rights, yet the legal constraints and practical harassments from authorities, limit the effectiveness of these organizations. Furthermore, the role of the civil society organizations is further weakened by governmental organizations (GONGOS) that pretend to operate under the cover of the law and in organizational format, such as the Supreme Council for Women, which is merely a political propaganda tool for the ruling party and the wives of the top officials in the country.

The Women's Petition Committee calls upon the authorities in Bahrain to refrain from politicizing woman rights and manipulating her rights for the political agenda for the ruling elite. The committee calls upon the authorities to embrace upon a series of reforms that will give women their rights and obligations as citizens of the country. This encompasses overcoming all difficulties and obstacles that prevent maintenance of these rights by filling the short legislative vacuum being at the forefront of these issues. The Women's Petition Committee demands the following:

1- To acknowledge women rights in Bahrain, as citizens of the country, cease the use of feminist slogans as part of political propaganda, and to abolish all organizations established to work along these deceptive agenda, the Supreme Council for Women being at the forefront of such organizations.

2- Introduce or enact legislations that protects the rights of women:

a- A family law suited for all religious sectors, to protect the rights of women in line with international women rights doctrines, and applied upon all women in Bahrain including members of the royal family.

b- The revision of the Nationality Law to ensure that the children of Bahraini women have the right to gain citizenship of their mothers.

c- A law that protects against violence within the family

d- A social security law for unprivileged women and those handicapped, disabled and of special needs.

e- A law that criminalizes human trafficking including all forms of discrimination against women, abuse of minors, and extortion of the underprivileged.

3- Cease all forms of discrimination against women at work in all official, legislative and social organizations. This includes developing a mechanism to implement the principles of CEDAW, and end all forms of career advancements on the basis of sectarian or tribal loyalties.

4- To give real chance for independent women's organizations to exercise its activities and provide them with the financial and logistical support, as well as eliminate all obstacles that impede their effectiveness and independence.

**Ghada Yousif Jamsheer**

Head of Women's Petition Committee

## Bahrain in HRW report 2009

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Acts" bill, despite concerns expressed by the UN special rapporteur on human rights while countering terrorism that it contained excessively broad definitions of terrorism and terrorist acts. The law also allows for extended periods of detention without charge or judicial review.

In February 2009 judicial authorities charged several high-profile opposition figures under the counterterrorism law. They were among those freed as a result of the king's April pardon.

**Torture and Ill-Treatment**

Local rights groups reported numerous allegations of due process violations, including 11 televised confessions that appeared to have been coerced. The government denied that officials had subjected any detainees to torture or inhumane treatment. In its submission to the UN Human Rights Council's Universal Periodic Review mechanism in April 2008, Bahrain stated that "there are no cases of torture in the kingdom."

Decree 56/2002, which confers immunity from investigation or prosecution on government officials alleged to be responsible for torture and other serious human rights abuses committed prior to 2001, remains on the books.

<http://www.hrw.org/en/world-report-2010/bahrain-0>

## Al Khalifa tortured boy

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the increase. Several NGOs are planning a large protest on 8<sup>th</sup> January to protest the announced decision to increase the price of car fuel and other commodities. Some sources have revealed that the Al Khalifa had been warned by their close allies that there would be dire consequences if this decision is implemented. It would give the opposition the golden opportunity to unite against the ruling family, and this would thus defeat its life-long policy of splitting the opposition on ideological and sectarian lines.

**Bahrain Freedom Movement**  
6<sup>th</sup> January 2009



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# Bahrain in HRW World report 2009

## *Human Rights Watch Events of 2009*

Bahrain's government in 2009 continued to subject freedom of expression, assembly, and association to arbitrary restrictions. The year saw increased confrontations between security forces and demonstrators protesting alleged discrimination by the Sunni-dominated government against the country's majority Shia population. Local rights groups accused authorities of using excessive force against protestors and subjecting detained opposition activists to torture and ill-treatment. In March and April clashes led to the deaths of a Pakistani worker (whose car was hit by a Molotov cocktail) and a Pakistani member of the security forces.

On April 11, Shaikh Hamad Bin Isa al-Khalifa, Bahrain's king, pardoned 178 opposition activists charged with and in some cases convicted of security-related offenses. However, the decree never appeared in the official gazette, leaving it unclear whether charges and prison terms might be revived.

On November 10, in line with a pledge it had made to the United Nations Human Rights Council, Bahrain established a National Institution for Human Rights, a government body charged with reviewing and developing legislation to comply with international human rights instruments.

### **Freedom of Expression and the Media**

Authorities continue to use the press law (Law 47/2002) to restrict coverage of controversial matters, including official corruption. In May 2008 the government announced a new draft press law that would remove criminal penalties for most journalistic infractions but appeared to retain the option of criminal penalties for certain types of written or spoken comment, including those found to "harm national unity." The draft still awaits approval by the National Assembly at this writing. Several journalists faced criminal prosecution under the current law for articles alleging favoritism and corruption by government agencies.

Several journalists told Human Rights Watch that Ministry of Interior officials contacted them to complain after they published articles that were even mildly critical of government policies, and in some cases intervened to prevent publication of information. In April 2009 authorities ordered the closure of the daily *Akhbar al-Khaleej*, citing violations of the press law, but lifted the ban after 24 hours.

The country's sole residential internet service provider, Batelco, is government-owned. The independent Bahrain Center for Human Rights (BCHR) re-

ported that in 2009 authorities blocked over 1,000 websites, including sites of political forums, blogs, newspapers, and human rights organizations such as the Arab Network for Human Rights Information.

In June 2009 the University of Bahrain, the country's sole public university, punished business student Noor Abbas by revoking one year of her academic record after she circulated a statement criticizing university policies and facilities. The university later reduced Abbas's punishment to "three warnings," meaning one more infraction would result in her expulsion. Abbas consequently ceased her student activism.

In November 2008, after several Bahraini rights and opposition activists held meetings in Washington, DC, Interior Minister Rashid bin Abdullah al-Khalifa threatened them with prosecution for violating article 134 of the penal code, which states that citizens who fail to obtain government permission to attend meetings abroad to discuss Bahraini domestic affairs may be subject to prison terms and fines.

### **Freedom of Assembly**

Law 32/2006 requires the organizers of any public meeting to notify the head of Public Security at least three days in advance, and authorizes that official to determine whether a meeting warrants police presence on the basis of "its subject ... or any other circumstance." The law stipulates that meeting organizers are responsible for "forbidding any speech or discussion infringing on public order or morals," but leaves "public order or morals" undefined. The BCHR reported that authorities forced the Al-Attar Center to cancel an August 2009 event at which several opposition leaders were scheduled to speak. Interior Ministry officials informed the center's president that they would deploy security forces to stop the event, and pressured the administrator to sign a statement taking personal responsibility if the event was held. On the day of the event, security forces prevented anyone from approaching the center.

Civil Society and Freedom of Association The government continues to deny legal status to the BCHR, which it ordered to be dissolved in 2004 after its then-president accused the prime minister of corruption and human rights violations. Several other groups, including the National Committee for the Unemployed and the Bahrain Youth Human Rights Society (BYHRS), attempted in 2005 to register with the Ministry of Social Development, as required by law, but at this writing have received no response to their applications. As of October 2009, Muhammad al-Maskati, president of the BYHRS, was facing up to six months in jail and/or a fine on charges related to working for an

unrecognized association.

In 2007 the Ministry of Social Development drafted new legislation on civil society organizations, but at this writing the ministry has not yet submitted the draft to parliament. The draft law contains some improvements over the existing Law 21/1989, but includes numerous provisions incompatible with international standards. A version of the draft law circulated in November 2007 authorizes the Ministry of Social Development to close any organization for up to 60 days without a court order if it deems the organization to have violated any Bahraini law, including the associations law.

Bahrain has ratified some International Labour Organization conventions, but neither of the two core conventions governing freedom of association. Law 33/2002 permits workers to form and join trade unions. Contrary to recommendations of the ILO Committee on Freedom of Association, a November 2006 edict by the prime minister remains in force prohibiting strikes in numerous sectors of the economy on the grounds that they provide essential services.

### **Women's Rights**

In May 2009 Bahrain passed its first written personal status law (Law 19/2009), but it applies only to Sunnis. Shia religious scholars demand a constitutional guarantee that the personal status law cannot be amended, while women's groups are pressing for a unified personal status law for all citizens. The government said that it is working toward social consensus in order to pass a personal status law applicable to Shia as well.

Sharia court judges—generally conservative religious scholars with limited formal legal training—decide marriage, divorce, custody, and inheritance cases according to their individual reading of Islamic jurisprudence and without reference to codified law. They consistently favor men in their rulings and are unapologetically adverse to women's equality. It remains unclear whether codification has alleviated these problems for Sunni women.

In July 2009 the semi-official Supreme Council for Women launched a campaign calling for equal nationality rights. Article 4 of the Citizenship Law of 1963 does not allow Bahraini women married to non-Bahraini men to pass on their nationality to their children, discriminating against more than 2,000 families in Bahrain. The king endorsed Law 35/2009, which mandates that children of Bahraini women married to non-Bahrainis pay the same fees as citizens for government services such as health, education, and accommodation.

### **Counterterrorism Measures**

In August 2006 the king signed into law the "Protecting Society from Terrorist

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