

BAHRAIN

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

Bahrain's natives have yet to live the best of days

A decade after the imposition of the most destructive political programme on our country, the reality of the Al Khalifa ruler has now been fully exposed to the world. Although native Bahrainis have been waiting for years as a result of the deep wounds inflicted onto them by the Al Khalifa since they had occupied the land, few people did listen or take notice of the agony of a people subjected to a programme of extermination. Decades of struggle during which many natives were slaughtered by the occupiers and thousands others tortured, maimed or banished have eroded any bond between the occupiers and the occupied. Today, Bahrainis have woken up to the bitter reality of being under the mercy of wolves and pirates, dressed in ordinary human garments. Once the costly make ups are removed, the ugly reality of the criminal gang becomes a shocking experience to human decency, as has happened in recent weeks. The modern world, it seems, is becoming more alien from values of human love, respect and co-existence. Forces of evil, in the disguise of dictatorial regimes and hereditary dictatorships, are able to rule with total impunity even when they commit the most abhorrent of crimes. The governments of "the free world" are complicit in the crimes of these antiquated regimes that not only get away with murder, but exist to commit nothing but murder.

Last month, the Washington-based Human Rights Watch produced a damning report about the systematic use of torture against Bahrainis. Titled "Torture redux", the report painted a terrifying saga by twenty victims who had endured horrible pains and injuries at the hands of the Al Khalifa torturers. The torture regime returned fully-fledged in 2007 and continued well into 2009. It is still administered. Four days after the launching of the HRW report, a new victim came forward to expose his fresh wounds inflicted by the Al Khalifa torturers. The Bahrain Centre for Human Rights issued a statement calling for an immediate halt to this criminal practice and for an impartial investigation into all torture claims. Instead of heeding the calls, the occupation regime showed no remorse, but exhibited a mood of defiance to all the allegations of torture. Senior

members, including the interior and foreign ministers expressed "willingness" to cooperate with HRW but insisted that no torture had taken place. They failed to form an independent inquiry into the HRW report. They are still detaining Bahrainis who oppose their occupation and repression. Most of the current prisoners have suffered ill-treatment in torture chambers, but none has been investigated by an independent body. It is clear that both ministers are complicit in the formulation of the torture policy being implemented by their thugs. What is even more worrying is the acceptance of countries like UK of the credentials of the current Al Khalifa ambassador, Khalifa bin Ali bin Rashid Al Khalifa, who was the head of the national security body when torture at its headquarters in Manama was being administered, according to HRW. Despite calls for his arrest as a criminal, the FCO has, hitherto, taken no action.

This is the bad news for freedom fighters who witness retardation in the standards of human rights and decency. But the good news is that dictators and despots cannot always win, and they often reach the end of the road as a result of their policies that lead to self-destruction. The regime of occupation in Bahrain has continued to dig its own grave. With its attack against liberties and freedoms, it has now earned itself a certificate in censorship, gagging and targeting activists for expressing their opinion. The ruler has immersed himself and members of his close circles in the quagmire of corruption, plundering and confiscation of people's lands and wealth. Bahrain has now become one of the worst dictatorships in the regime, despite the massive programme of deception, misinformation and bribery. Senior members appear to have been taken aback by last month's Freedom House report which dealt a harsh blow to their regime. It reclassified it from having "partial freedom" into a regime which is "not free". The report, undertaken by this prestigious body has vindicated the claims by the Bahraini natives who have all along complained of lack of freedom. This is yet a significant addition to the other

black sides of the Al Khalifa occupation regime. The US State Department's annual human rights report has always castigated it as violating the religious freedom of the natives. The freedom of speech also suffered under the Al Khalifa ruling junta. The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), in its 2009 report said "The press freedom climate, which had improved with the establishment of seven independent newspapers in the wake of the 2001 reforms, has undergone a gradual deterioration over the past several years. That decline accelerated in 2009 as the government blocked domestic access to more than 1,000 Web sites and pursued politicized court complaints against critical journalists."

What achievement has the Al Khalifa dictatorship achieved to celebrate? This list of failings has sealed the fate of the ruler's political programme that was doomed from the beginning. The notorious Decree Law 56 that granted impunity to torturers has always been viewed as a tool to maintain the policy of torture. Added to all these failings the crime of genocide being implemented with force by the ruler and his clique in order to wipe out the historical culture of the natives and reduce them into a minority. This genocide has now exceeded all other crimes and the Bahrainis have now realized that not only have their rights been confiscated (as illustrated by the various international reports) but their existence is now under threat. The Al Khalifa have thus engaged themselves in a war with the natives of Bahrain with rigour and audacity never experienced before. To them, it is a war with the occupiers to safeguard their existence, having been subjected to policies of displacement and transfer. While the regime's tactics of wooing some individuals may have bought him some time, the awareness of the Bahraini activists have awoken the natives to the plight awaiting them as they are transformed into a minority. Bahrain is thus bracing itself to more battles between the natives and the Al Khalifa occupiers who have employed dirty tactics including torture, suppression of freedoms and genocide. The best of days have yet to be lived by the natives of Bahrain.

Senior Al Khlaifa figures indirectly implicated in torture

A state of despair has plunged the morale of the ruling junta in Bahrain to their lowest since the imposition of the political programme of the ruler. This has followed the publication last of the latest report by the Washington-based Human Rights Watch (HRW) that confirmed the return to torture in the notorious Al Khalifa prisons. The report is the outcome of a thorough investigation by the human rights body following the persistent claims by former prisoners, their families and lawyers that they had been subjected to systematic forms of torture. The report was launched in Manama on Monday 8th February by Joe Stork; the Deputy Director of HRW and Joshua Colangelo-Bryan, a consultant with Human Rights Watch and senior attorney in the New York office of Dorsey & Whitney LLP will present the report. The two co-editors of the report also took part in a Press Conference at the House of Lords in London on Wednesday 10th February which was extensively covered by TV channels. Several international news agencies had covered the Manama launching of the report. It contained vivid accounts of the use of four main kind of torture: electric shocks using stunt guns, hanging from the wrists, falaqa (beating on the soles while the body is hung on two poles and general beating including kicks, punches and lashing with hoses. The torture sessions were administered in

three main detention centres; the Al Adliya, the Dry Dock and the National Security Headquarters (NSHQ) in Manama which is currently run by the former Ambassador to UK, Khalifa bin Abdulla Al Khalifa. The torture there started when the NSHQ was being run by the present Ambassador, Khalifa bin Ali bin Rashid Al Khalifa. The implication of this Ambassador is a serious claim that has put pressure on the UK Government to take action against this confirmed torturer. Meanwhile Bahrainis have reacted angrily to the return to torture as a routine practice against detainees. While the foreign minister attempted to appease his families allies in London and Washington by suggesting to "look into the allegations in the claims of torture" Bahrain human rights activists and the families of victims have demanded the repeal of the notorious Law 56 that had facilitated the crimes of torture and the immediate arrest of at least the five people whose names were clearly mentioned in the reports as the main torturers. Calls have also been made to investigate the role of the senior figures of the Al Khalifa junta who must have known of these crimes. Bahrainis are now seeking international action against the Al Khalifa torturers and those elements responsible for implementing policies of genocide against the people of Bahrain. The ruler has himself become under suspicion of abetting both crimes, and steps

are being taken worldwide for his arrest. Anger has now surfaced again amongst human rights activists as the ruling junta took steps to exact revenge against the victims of their torture. The prosecution department which is itself implicated in the torture claims by HRW has re-opened the file of the case of Karzakkan to justify the torture that had been inflicted on the individuals linked to it. A court run by the Al Khalifa has postponed its verdict on appeal against the acquittal of more than 20 Bahrainis who had falsely accused of killing one of the mercenaries. The step is ill-intentioned and badly-timed. The victims have been urged to attend the court en mass to re-iterate their ordeals during torture sessions and to name their torturers. International human rights organizations have been urged to attend that session to witness the extent of the Al Khalifa crimes against Bahrainis.

The families of the detained Bahrainis who still languish in the torture cells run by the ruling junta. On 11th February the people of Sihla went out in a peaceful protest last week and painted slogans on the walls for the immediate release of Bahrainis. The walls in Sitra were also painted with similar slogans. Meanwhile the foreign mercenaries have waged more attacks against the cultural and religious activities of the natives.

Bahrain Freedom Movement
14th February 2010

War on freedom of expression continues with attacks on AFP and DPA

The ministry of censorship run by the ruling family has reprimanded the correspondents of two international news agencies working in Bahrain. Mohammad Fadil of the Agence France Press (AFP) and Mazin Mahdi were summoned by the officials of the ministry of information, run by Mai Al Khalifa and told to change their line of coverage to favour the regime or their offices would be closed down. The ruling family has been angered by the leaking of the news that it had granted Bahraini nationality to members of Al Qa'ida as part of the genocidal project against the natives. It was reported that terrorist acts were being planned by Al Qa'ida against foreign forces in the country and that the perpetrators are naturalised foreigners. It is understood that both agencies are locked in negotiations with the ruling family to solve the problem. Censorship by the ruling family has been practiced over the years and DPA was targeted in the nineties. On Tuesday 1st July 1997, Ute Meinel, DPA Correspondent in Manama, was expelled after being given 24 hours to leave the country. Meanwhile, concern has been widely

expressed by the people about the health of a Bahraini youth who has been subjected to ill-treatment since he had been arrested on 18th November 2009. Ali Ibrahim Alhmad Al Salmabadi was taken to the Interrogation Centre which is notorious for the torture techniques it employs against detainees. There Ali was subjected to electric shocks, beating and hanging from the feet and hands for hours until he "confessed" to a crime he had not committed. His health deteriorated rapidly to the extent that the torturers released him to avoid his death in their hands. He remained in coma in hospital and his life hangs in the balance. His family refrained from talking about their son for fear of reprisals. His torturers are being sheltered by the Law 56 decreed by the ruler.

More Bahrainis are arrested and tortured. Yesterday the people of Maqsha went out to protest against the minister of the interior who is conducting immoral policies against Bahrainis. They burnt tyres at the Budaya Road and chanted anti-regime slogans. The foreign-staffed riot police attacked the demonstrators and raided the village. On Sunday, the youth of Dair went out at dawn to write slogans on the walls of the town. They called for the immediate

and unconditional release of the detained Bahrainis. On 27th and 28th January several villages and towns witnessed more protests against the ruling Al Khalifa junta who have plundered the country, its wealth and lands. Daih, Sanabis, Malikiyah and Sitra Jidhafs, Abu Saibe' and other places became scenes of hide and seek between Bahrainis and the foreign-staffed riot police. Bahrainis are now determined to force the Al Khalifa occupiers either to agree to a constitution written by the people or leave the country since they have lost the popular and constitutional legitimacy.

Early this morning its riot police and Death Squads attacked the religious symbols of the Bahrainis along the Budaya Road, tearing banners and removing black cladding. Bahrainis have been preparing to commemorate the Arba'een (the 49th Day after the events of Karbala) as they have done for hundreds of years. The foreign occupiers targeted Marwazan, Jidhafs and Sanabis. Anger has spread to all areas and a spate showdown is expected between the Bahrainis and the occupiers in the next few days.

Bahrain Freedom Movement
2nd January 2010

Human Rights Watch presents its report on torture in Bahrain

A Press Conference, organised by Lord Avebury, was held on Wednesday 10th February 2010 at the House of Lords to present the latest Human Rights Watch (HRW) report on torture in Bahrain. The report entitled (Torture Redux) was launched on Monday in Manama by HRW officials. Lord Avebury said that we thought that torture had ceased after the notorious Ian Henderson had retired, but we now have this damning report by HRW. Then he introduced the speakers; Joe Stork and Joshua

Joe Stork said: "My first visit to Bahrain was in 1996 during the intifada, there were street demonstrations and many arrests. The country has had a reputation of administering torture for a long time, and the HRW report in 1997 is a testimony to this. After King Hamad came to power, reforms were undertaken; the State Security Court and the State Security Law were abolished and prisoners freed. However no investigation of torture was done and no medical examinations of victims were conducted. Some UK nationals (Ian Henderson and his personnel) were implicated in torture.

In the past decade Bahrain could have avoided torture completely. In the early part of the decade there were demonstrations; and people were beaten but there were no reports of torture. When Bahrain submitted its Review Report to the Human Rights Commission in 2005 it stated that no torture had existed. We did not have to counter that claim then. But in 2007 allegations of torture started to come out. At the beginning these allegations were non-specific. We sent letters to the officials and issued statements of concern. But as allegations continued in 2009, we decided to investigate ourselves.

So when King Hamad pardoned 178 detainees in April 2009 we saw it as an opportunity to meet them. HRW's methodology is to talk to victims. Joshua took the initiative with myself to go to Bahrain in June 2009 to meet detainees. The Government still denies allegations of torture, so we had to make a good case. We believe the report contains the truth. Ten years ago we could not have held the research and the Press Conference in Manama. We did not have medical records then. This report is the same as that of 1997 and puts spotlight on Bahrain and its law-enforcements system.

Then Joshua Colangelo-Bryan talked about the report. He said: "We went to Bahrain and interviewed 20 detainees. They had been arrested in connection with three cases. The first is that of Jidhafs (in which it was alleged that weapons were stolen from a

police car). The second is that of Karzakkan (which is linked to the alleged burning of the farm of a member of the ruling family, Abdul Aziz Atiyyat Allah) and third was that of the case known as the Al Hujjaira case (in which it was alleged that a group of Bahrainis had been trained in Syria). Based on interviews with these individuals we realised a set of interrogation methods adopted by the CID at Al Adliyya, the Dry Dock and the National Security Headquarters at Manama Fort. Torture includes:

Electric shocks using Stunt Guns.

Suspension of detainees in the air from their wrists and feet.

Falaqa (beating on the feet and is very painful).

General beating; slaps, punches, kicks, hoses etc.

This torture is usually carried out during interrogation to secure "confessions" that form the basis for prosecution.

In Jidhafs case, the repeated questions to the detainees were: Where is the gun? Who took the gun? Where did you hide it?

We know that "confessions" were obtained in this way by 18 out of 19 detainees. The judge later threw them out later. We consider the testimonies given to us by former detainees credible for the following reasons:

They are consistent; they compliment each other and show a set of finite set of techniques.

They were consistent with the manner these techniques were employed such as the use of the Stunt Gun. We know from our experience that people lose consciousness momentarily when subjected to short shocks by these guns.

Many detainees were suspended in a Stair Well. Wrists were handcuffed. A piece of cloth was placed on the wrists to prevent visible injuries to them.

We are not naïve. There is a possibility of collusion. But we discounted that possibility because their accounts to us are the same as the ones they had given to lawyers and to the courts.

The other primary form of evidence is the volume of reports by government doctors. These records provide a lot of information. They provide evidence that abuses were

committed. Court records also show detainees had scars on their wrists and shoulders. The government says that the marks on the wrists are because of using ordinary handcuffs. But the doctors dismissed this explanation. Doctors have found that in seven reports marks that indicate suspension from the wrists. In Karzakkan case, 17 out of 28 showed scars consistent with abuse. It is thus difficult to conclude that abuses had not occurred. The judge in the Karzakkan case had thrown the cases because he was not comfortable with the "confessions". Ultimately, we could not have concluded that there were no abuses. Then Joe Stork added that the abuses involve other layers of the officials. The Public Prosecutors are supposed to ask and observe victims about marks of abuse. In some cases they referred them to medical tests. In many cases they did not. This is serious dereliction of their duties and makes them complicit. Other individuals at the ministry and security officers are also complicit.

Our recommendations are:

- carry out impartial investigation
- perpetrators should be; first removed, second; prosecuted. We met the Attorney General. They said: We did not receive complaints of ill-treatment. That does not absolve them of responsibility. International regulations say that they have obligations to investigate abuses whenever they occur. The minister of the interior said that investigation had been undertaken and there would be re-investigated..
- Set up independent commission to look into the matter.
- Pay compensation to victims. None has been provided.
- We urge the governments which have security arrangements with Bahrain (USA, UK and France) to urge Bahrain to correct its behaviour.

Representatives from the embassies of these countries attended the Press Conference in Manama and they are aware of our concerns.

Lord Avebury added that the Special Rapporteur on Torture to visit Bahrain.

Joe Stork said that the High Commissioner on Human Rights will make a visit to Bahrain in April.



Attacks on the Press 2009: Bahrain

Top Developments

- *Authorities block Web sites critical of the government, the king, and Islam.*
- *Officials pursue politicized court complaints against critical reporters.*

Key Statistic

1,040: Web sites that the Ministry of Information ordered censored in September.

Bahrain has made significant strides in improving its human rights record since political reforms enacted in 2001, particularly concerning universal suffrage and the dismantlement of an abusive state security court system. But some reforms have yet to be fully realized, among them improving political representation for the marginalized Shiite majority and ensuring more equitable standing for women in family courts. The press freedom climate, which had improved with the establishment of seven independent newspapers in the wake of the 2001 reforms, has undergone a gradual deterioration over the past several years. That decline accelerated in 2009 as the government blocked domestic access to more than 1,000 Web sites and pursued politicized court complaints against critical journalists.

and Information Minister Sheikha Mai bint Muhammad Al-Khalifa issued an order in January compelling Internet service providers to block Web sites identified as offensive by the ministry. Despite protests from numerous press freedom groups, including CPJ, the government blocked dozens of sites in the first eight months of the year. The censorship effort escalated in September, when the Ministry of Information ordered the Telecommunications Regulatory Authority, the government's Internet regulator, to block 1,040 more sites, according to the Bahrain Center for Human Rights. Although the government characterized its campaign as being aimed at pornography, CPJ research shows that journalistic blogs, news Web sites, discussion forums, and human rights Web sites were also blocked. Internet users who attempted to reach those pages were met with a screen that read: "This Web site has been blocked for violating regulations and laws of the Kingdom of Bahrain."

With one of the most Web-connected populations in the region—a third of its residents are online—Bahrain had been home to hundreds of Web sites, according to the Bahrain Center for Human Rights. Among them were about 200 blogs, many focusing on political and social issues and most written anonymously. Bahrain filters sites critical of the government, the ruling family, and Islam, according to August 2009 findings published by

OpenNet Initiative, an academic partnership that studies Internet censorship.

The online dichotomy reflects the country's political development over the past decade: Steps toward reform and transparency have been followed by steps back toward repression. Hamad bin Isa al-Khalifa replaced his more conservative father in 1999 as emir and proclaimed himself king in 2002. In response to decades-long demands from the country's dispossessed Shiite majority, he led the institution of significant reforms in 2001 that included the release of political prisoners, the return of exiles, and the drafting of a new constitution that resurrected parliament after three decades of dormancy. After the reforms of 2001, Bahrain's media underwent a revival as five Arabic and two English newspapers began tackling sensitive topics such as human rights, corruption, and discrimination against Shiite citizens. Facing the emergence of critical news media, the government embraced legislative tools to suppress content.

Despite constitutional guarantees for press freedom, government agencies continued to enforce the heavy-handed Press and Publications Law of 2002, which prescribes prison terms of up to five years for material considered an affront to Islam or the king, and content perceived as undermining state security or the monarchy. The appointed upper chamber of parliament has twice proposed press law amendments—most recently in 2008—intended to mitigate its harshest provisions, but an elected lower chamber dominated by conservative elements has consistently turned back those proposals.

Government officials pursued politicized criminal complaints against two journalists who had produced investigative reports on alleged public corruption. In each case, the government appeared less intent on jailing the journalists than on harassing them through repeated court summonses.

Maryam al-Shrooqi, a reporter for the independent daily *Al-Wasat*, was found guilty in September on insult charges stemming from a 2008 article that alleged religious discrimination in the hiring policies of the Department of Civil Services. The department had filed a criminal complaint, accusing her of insult and the more serious charges of fabrication and defamation. The Supreme Criminal Court eventually dismissed the most serious charges and fined al-Shrooqi 50 dinars (US\$133). The court also ordered *Al-Wasat* to print a summary of the verdict in the same place in the paper as the original article. An appeal was pending in late year.

Lamees Dhaif, a columnist for the privately owned daily *Al-Waqt*, was also summoned to court on charges of insulting the judiciary in a series, "The Dossier of

Great Shame," published in February. The pieces detailed alleged bias against women in family courts, reflecting one of the unfulfilled political reforms of 2001. The Supreme Judicial Council, the judiciary's highest administrative body, had lodged a criminal complaint against Dhaif after she refused a judiciary official's demands to write an apology and an article praising the court system. The prosecution was suspended in September but can be resurrected at any time.

Media harassment of human rights defenders

Mohamed Al Maskati

A media harassment campaign has recently been launched against human rights defenders Mr Nabeel Rajab, Mr Mohamed Al-Maskati and Mr Abdul Ghani Al-Khanjar. Nabeel Rajab is the president of the Bahrain Center for Human Rights, Mohamed Al-Maskati is the president of the Bahrain Youth Society for Human Rights, and Abdul Ghani Al-Khanjar is the spokesperson for the National Committee for Martyrs and Victims of Torture.

Further Information

Front Line previously issued appeals concerning Nabeel Rajab on 25 November 2009, 30 October 2008, 22 September 2006, 20 July 2005, 14 June 2005 and 29 September 2004, and concerning Mohamed Al-Maskati on 5 February 2009, 3 November 2008, 19 December 2007 and 1 February 2007.

Recently, local online newspapers The Gulf News (<http://www.akhbar-alkhaleej.com>) and Al Watan News (<http://www.alwatannews.net>) as well as the Bahrain Radio Station have issued false statements concerning the aforementioned human rights defenders. The three defenders have repeatedly been accused by these media outlets of committing violent acts, using Molotov bombs, and of betraying their country.

This campaign began following the publication of the Human Rights Watch report "Torture Redux" on the use of torture in Bahrain, on 8 February 2010. In the report, Human Rights Watch expressed its thanks to the human rights activists who assisted in the preparation of the report including Nabeel Rajab, Mohamed Al-Maskati and Abdul Ghani Al-Khanjar. Front Line believes that Nabeel Rajab, Mohamed Al-Maskati and Abdul Ghani Al-Khanjar have been targeted as a result of their human rights activities, in particular their involvement in the preparation of the recent Human Rights Watch report on the use of torture in Bahrain. Front Line fears for the physical and psychological integrity of the aforementioned defenders.

