

BAHRAIN

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

Tyranny must not be allowed to prevail, dictatorship must end

Several questions have been circulating amongst the elite and activists in Bahrain. Among them are: What is the international community going to do about the deteriorating political and human rights deterioration in that country? Now that the ruling family has been proved to be oppressive, non-democratic (according to the recent Freedom House re-ranking of Bahrain), sectarian and genocidal, how could international bodies tolerate any dealing with this regime? Why do the Western governments continue to prop up a regime that is intent on flouting international laws and conventions in regards to human rights, the rights of the native people and the right to choose the government? In addition to the recently-published extensive report by Human Rights Watch and Freedom House, two other statements have been subsequently published. The first was a petition sponsored by IFEX (The International Freedom of Expression Exchange) signed by 53 NGOs calling on UN High Commissioner to support human rights activists, journalists and bloggers who have been targeted by the regime to suppress their activities. They also condemned the closure of the Bahrain Society of Nurses which was officially closed because the Society had planned a rally in support of its Committee member for nursing the injured Bahraini. The other was a statement by Amnesty International inquiring about the recent detention of two nurses for taking care of a Bahraini victim shot by members of the Death Squads. Mr Hussain Ali Hassan Al Sehlawi sustained more than seventy shrapnel pieces as he left his grandfather's house. It was a brazen attack that led to feelings of anger.

While the pro-democracy movement is determined to pursue its generations-long peaceful struggle to establish a civilised modern regime in their country; the ruling family that had occupied the land has adopted an iron-fist policy towards the natives. Not only have these natives have been denied basic civil and political rights, their existence has been seriously threatened by the Al Khalifa. Over the past ten years, the present ruler, who had inherited his position after the death of his father, has embarked on an extensive political programme that aims at the gradual extermination of the natives. This is being pur-

sued through a programme of extensive naturalisation of foreigners imported from Syria, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Yemen and Pakistan. The basic rights of Bahrainis have been significantly compromised, threatened and in many cases taken away by the comprehensive use of force against the opposition. The situation is now taking serious dimensions while polarisation of opinion is reaching a state where any future rapprochement between the natives and the occupiers may not be possible. The opposition has solidified its position in recent months with wide-ranging activities including the adoption of a civil resistance programme. The Formula 1 races, sponsored by the ruler and his son as flagship of their public relation exercise aimed at boosting their image in the West were marred by a massive countrywide civil resistance programme. Many journalists who attended the races have spoken of their shock at the extent of the unpopularity of the regime.

The political programme imposed by the ruling family has inherent weaknesses that have now been exposed. It is based on three main pillars that have been comprehensively exposed by the Bahraini activists. First is the "democratic" process. The past eight years have now proved beyond any doubt that the only dimension of this "democracy" has been the elections of half the members of a powerless consultative council. High salaries and benefits to these members are meant to cripple their freedom to oppose the criminal activities of the Al Khalifa officials. But the people have now realised that democracy is simply incompatible with a hereditary dictatorship and that elections do not constitute democracy. In the absence of the rule of law the country has been ruled by decrees, cronyism and personal tastes and links. The second pillar of the programme is the issue of human rights. At the beginning there ruler released the political prisoners in a step that his media had hailed as ground-breaking initiative. However, it has now been proved that human rights have been severely violated and that Bahrain has become a black spot in the international records of human rights. Bahrainis have been arbi-

trarily arrested, tortured and killed outside the due process of law. The ruler and his son have been shown to be monsters in the form of human beings as the images of mutilated bodies of Bahrainis are seen on internet pages and websites. It is a sad episode in a world that is increasingly claiming to be against human rights abuses. The third pillar is the demographic transformation that has taken horrific dimensions. On all counts, the Al Khalifa have failed and their programme has thus not only come to a halt but has become a testimony to the torture of a country and its natives. The world stands guilty of complicity in crimes that have surpassed any limits of human taste and decency.

The existence of some Bahrain refugees outside the borders has remained a source of irritation to the leading figures of the ruling Al Khalifa family. Although their numbers are less than the hand fingers, the media attacks on UK for allowing a handful of Bahraini refugees have not ceased. Britain is blamed for offering refuge to a total of five victims of the Al Khalifa who have remained loyal to their cause. This is in contrast to the army of lobbyists in UK, USA and elsewhere whose main functions are to enhance the image of the Al Khalifa and counter the efforts of the opposition.

This political polarisation will therefore become more entrenched as the ocean of enmity between the occupiers and the occupied takes wider dimensions. The people of Bahrain have paid dearly for their steadfastness and patriotism. But they have always embraced these difficulties with open hearts and minds. As more victims fall prey to those aggressive attackers intent on killing and maiming their Bahraini victims, there appears to be more determination to pursue the path of struggle as the only way out from the evil Al Khalifa occupation. Now that more international NGOs are becoming more aware of the plight of the Bahrainis, the Bahraini activists see more signs of hope and divergence along the path of the path of their civil resistance campaign. It is a struggle between right and wrong, democracy and dictatorship, virtue and evil and between righteous natives and oppressive occupiers.

Revenge attacks by Death Squads following the Formula 1 debacle

In clear revenge to the activism during the formula 1 race last week, the ruling family has ordered the arrest of scores of Bahrainis for their alleged part in the protests and demonstrations. Many towns and villages were targeted; Duraz, Ma'amir, Aali and Jidhafs Housing, Ras Rumman and Hamad Town. Ibrahim Al Demstani from Duraz who works as a nurse was arrested for allegedly helping an injured youth. A young man from Jidhafs went to the Sulaimaniya Hospital for treatment to his burnt hand and was arrested. There were countrywide protests during the annual racing festival which are used by the ruling family to deceive Western opinion and camouflage the boiling situation in the country.

Meanwhile a young Bahraini has become the latest to be hit by cluster bullets. Hussain Ali Hassan Al Sahlawi, 25, from Sehla town was targeted while apparently taking part in a peaceful demonstration in Karzakkan. The bullet is of a special type that would disintegrate into small shrapnel that would penetrate the body in many places and would create intolerable pain. His condition is described as serious. Ten people were known to have been detained in connection with the protests including Abdul Aziz Al Sehlawi from Sehla, Adel Ahmad Al Barni, from Ras Rumman, Mahmood Al Diwan,

from Al Ma'amir, Hussain Ali Hassan Al Sehlawi from Hamad Town and Ibrahim Yousuf Madan from Nabih Salih. He was released later after receiving an extensive session of torture and ill treatment. Some of them were brought near the British Embassy in a shameful way to create an atmosphere of terror among Bahrainis and to put pressure on UK for granting political asylum to victims of the Al Khalifa torture. One of the notorious torturers, Ahmad Bu Cheri recorded the "crime" of the innocent Bahrainis as they "re-enacted" it.

Some youth from Abu Saibe came out to the main Budayya Road, raised their pro-democracy slogans and burnt tyres in protest at the recent arrests of Bahrainis and to call for an end to the political naturalization crime. Calls have been made for the release of the political prisoners by activists such as Dr Abdul Jalil Al Singace and Sheikh Abdul Hadi Al Mokhowdar. They took part in today's protest in Sitra, near Al Islah Hussaini Hall. Another protest was organized near the town of Musalla to protest the arbitrary detention of Bahrainis and the shooting of Al Sehlawi. Another protest was held in Duraz near the main roundabout. They were viciously attacked by riot police and Death Squads. The attackers invaded the town creating fear among the children and

women. Columns of smoke were seen billowing above Sanabis.

During the days of the Formula many areas staged protests to highlight the plight of the natives who are being subjected to cultural, economic and political genocide. Many protests were held in Sitra, Mhazza. Several fires were ignited near the interior ministry headquarters and were seen by foreign journalists covering the event. Manama also witnessed protests and demonstrations last week. The town of Malikiya was also the scene of major protests on the two days of the races on 11th and 12th March. One day later, the royal court ordered an attack on the town. Prohibited gases and ammunition were used to quell the unrest.

Four youth from Samaheej have filed a case against the Al Khalifa run interior ministry for serious injuries they sustained in a barbaric attack on them as they drove a car past a police jeeps. They were terrorized for three hours. They were first stopped, surrounded by forty mercenaries and beaten up mercilessly. The youth then went to a nearby police station to report the crime but were not given a listening ear. They were then taken to the Sulaimaniya Hospital for treatment.

Bahrain Freedom Movement
19th March 2010

Tension and protests on the eve of the Formula 1 races

On the eve of the Formula 1 car races in Bahrain, the citizens have raised the stakes by taking their struggle a step forward through several means. First they are writing anti-regime slogans on walls especially in areas close to the racecourse in the South of the country. Today, the people of Karzakkan braved the presence of the security forces and Death Squads and painted the walls with their slogans calling for the release of political prisoners, an end to the use of torture against Bahrainis and a constitution written by the people to replace the present Al Khalifa imposed constitution. At the same time, the youth of Sitra marched in the streets burning tyres and shouting slogans for a democratic rule to replace the present hereditary dictatorship. Near Wadyan Roundabout, fires were raging as the foreign-staffed riot police were trying in vain to extinguish the flames. The journalists who are in the country to cover the event have a first hand experience with the people who are defying the repressive regime and risking their lives. Several journalists have expressed astonishment at the extent of opposition to the ruling family. In Sanabis protests have continued unabated for the past few days calling for

the unconditional release of political prisoners. Among the fast spreading slogans is that calling for an end to genocidal policies directed against the majority of the citizens. Fires were seen near the traffic signals near Al Hashimi Mall. The district of Marwazan was raided by the riot police and death squads for more than twenty minutes before they were forced to flee the scene under serious resistance from Bahrainis.

Early in the week, the town of Dair witnessed serious confrontations between the natives and the foreign-staffed riot police. The protesters called for the release of political prisoners and the abandonment of the show trials. On 7th March rubber bullets were extensively used in the confrontation in addition to chemical and tear gases, sound bombs and electric truncheons. On their part, the natives used stones and Molotov cocktail to deter the enemies who were attempting to break into the town.

The spiraling violence by the government police is a reaction to the deteriorating conditions inside the torture chambers. Kumail Al Ghannami who was detained for taking part in a peaceful protest has been denied treatment for his psychological problems developed after being severely tortured. Despite a court order to

treat Kumail, officials at the police station where he is detained have repeatedly refused to let him receive the necessary treatment. An eyewitness described his condition as serious to the extent that he could not walk straight.

Another prisoner, Abdul Aziz Abdul Redha has started hunger strike in protest at the ill-treatment he is being subjected to at the hands of the torturers. He is from Sihla and is being held at the notorious torture centre at Al Khamis. The torturers refused to transfer him to the health clinic for treatment. He has been suffering strong pain in his stomach. He also suffers from kidney problems for which he receives no treatment. This is one form of torture and ill-treatment inflicted on native Bahrainis.

In the town of Ma'amir, three women have been campaigning for the release of their children since Monday. The women who are accompanied by a girl, have been pursued by several jeeps full of heavily armed soldiers. They have been carrying pictures of their beloved ones and a large banner calling for their release as they had committed no offence. The oppressive regime continues to give them a deaf ear.

Bahrain Freedom Movement
11th March 2010

Attacks on the Press 2009: Bahrain

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.

Culture and Information Minister Sheikha Mai bint Muhammad AlKhalifa 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 Webconnected 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

alKhalifa 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 alShrooqi, a reporter for the independent daily AlWasat, 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 alShrooqi 50 dinars (US\$133). The court also ordered AlWasat 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 AlWaqf, 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.

Committee for Protection of Journalists

Protests continue as more Bahrainis detained, tortured

Riot police and Death Squads attacked a peaceful marathon yesterday calling for an end to genocide (demographic change) and torture. The marathon with the motto "No to political naturalization, No to torture" that started near Malikiyal town. As the participants who had formed a human chain were approaching the town's roundabout, they were mercilessly attacked by large numbers of riot police and members of the notorious Death Squads, who acted on orders from the ruler's court. The marchers had hoped to send a message to the world that Bahrain has been plagued by these two intractable crisis; the settlement of foreigners that had led to the displacement of thousands of Bahrainis to other areas inside and outside their homeland, and the torture regime that has been recently highlighted by the report issued earlier this month by Human Rights Watch. Five people were arrested as the attackers pursued demonstrators in the town's lanes and alleyways. Eyewitnesses have confirmed that they received "summary justice" and torture on the spot. The attackers used chemical and tear gases, rubber bul-

lets and stunt guns to terrorise the demonstrators.

Calls have been made for the arrest and trial of five notorious torturers accused by the HRW report of administering torture against Bahrainis in a systematic way. The five torturers are: Yousuf Al Arabi, Fahd Al Fadhalah, Bader Al Ghaith, Bassam Al Me'raj and Isa Al Majali. Instead of heeding the call for an investigation into their alleged crimes, the ruler has ordered that they be moved into other positions. For example, Fadh Al Fadhalah has been transferred to another post within the ministry of the interior to work with the civilian police forces. Yousuf Al Arabi has apparently been moved to Gulf Air. It is clear that the regime can never give up torturing Bahrainis, and would always make some maneuvers to avoid sanctions by the international bodies.

Yesterday, the youth of the village of Sar demonstrated against the continued abuse of human rights, the detention of Bahrainis and the extensive use of torture.

They also called for a democratic

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NSA orchestrates imprisonment and smear of an activist

Fingers pointing to the NSA for standing behind orchestrating imprisonment and smear of a well known activist

The Human Rights Bureau of the HAQ movement expresses concern about the continuing attack on activists and human rights defenders in Bahrain. On a bail of 1000 Dinars (US \$ 2653) and travel ban, the Bahraini authorities released last Sunday Jamsheer Fairouz (52 years)- a well known activist- after detaining him for a week in a criminal case following a complaint made by a lady who was with her daughter in Muharraq market when he was also shopping there with his wife. After attending Muharraq police station, the lady and her daughter admitted that their was a confusion and misunderstanding and immediately dropped the case against Jamsheer.

From the moment of Jamsheer's detention and until his release, the whole issue, in its moral and crime context, was disseminated in the electronic and written media as well as in electronic forums in a suspicious manner, leading to the belief of the intention to publicly tarnish his and his family's reputation. The "complainant" family asserted in the Prosecution as well as in the media that they reconciled with Jamsheer after realising that they made a mistake and what happened was a matter of confusion and misunderstanding, thereby insisting on dropping the case. But the truth of the matter, stated and published by the "complainant" family, was not interceding enough to the Public Prosecution, which insisted on the composition of a case against Jamsheer and ordered for his imprisonment for a week without investigation.

What was suspicion in the intention to discredit, defame and imprison Jamsheer without a cause, is the speed at which the news spread of his detention on the same charge denied by the family. Moreover, the news was allowed to disseminate and deliberate to the breaking news, newspapers and suspicious electronic forums in a clear reference to his person and family, showing the real intention behind it.

What happened to Jamsheer Fairouz, a well known political prisoner in the nineties, could not be disconnected from his social and cultural activities in Kuwait, which he emigrated to after harassing him in his job after the then release from prison. Jamsheer was forced to live and work in Kuwait for many years, as he was not able to do so in Bahrain in light of the blockade by the state security apparatus. This treatment was applied also on several activists during that period and until this moment. During his stay in Kuwait,

Jamsheer was occasionally harassed by the Kuwaiti authorities, at the instigation and guidance of the security apparatus in Bahrain. The latest incident was in a memorial service in Kuwait in which several prominent figures were subsequently arrested. Jamsheer was one of those wanted but were not present Kuwait at the time of the arrest. He could go back to Kuwait only after the file was closed by the Kuwaiti public prosecution and lifting the entry ban, when he finished all his business and returned to Bahrain. It is nearly two years now since then, during which he was involved in many community and cultural rights activities. Jamsheer is still out of work, and could not win any job opportunity he applied for.

The suspicions fall about the National Security Apparatus (NSA) being behind this campaign against Jamsheer, which comes within its efforts to retaliate from political activists and human rights defenders, in an attempt to twist their arms and break their will. This is achieved by fabrication of moral criminal cases against the activists in order to tarnish their reputations in a society, like Bahrain, which is sensitive and interacts with this type of campaigns.

The case against Jamsheer is not the first of its kind to discredit activists by linking them to moral issues. In 2005 and later, Abdul Raouf Al-Shayeb - the former president of the National Committee for Martyrs and Victims of Torture, was a victim of this NSA tactic which forced him to seek asylum and immigration to the United Kingdom. Members of the

same Apparatus sexually assaulted Musa Abdali - an active member and co-founder of the Unemployed Committee, and threatened to do the same for the other activists. Musa was asked by the NSA members who assaulted him to convey the threats to certain activist and eventually was also forced to resort to the United Kingdom for safe haven.

On the other hand, the prosecution in Bahrain has been known of its allegiance to the Security Apparatuses from which most of the heads of prosecutors deputies came prior to their current position. This includes the Attorney General - Ail Al-Buainain - who headed the Legal Affairs Department reporting to the Interior Minister after enjoyed several promotions and various posts in the ministry.

HAQ movement therefore calls for the following:

1 - The security authorities to stop targeting activists and fabrication of criminal cases against them in order to break their will and influence their activism and effectiveness in the community.

2 - Drop all charges and close the case against Jamsheer Fairouz, provide him and his family an apology, compensation and reparation for the damage they have suffered because of the authorities-lead defamation.

3 - The prosecution of those responsible for the defamation campaign, whether in the security apparatus or in the media, who worked on the diffuse, publishing and promotion of the issue.

HAQ Movement, 24th March 2010

Protests Continue, more arrested, *Cont from P 3*

constitution and an end to the absolute dictatorship. Just after mid day, the demonstrators hurried to the main road, burnt some tyres, shouted some slogans and made their voices heard by those who were in the area. They were attacked by members of the Death Squads and attacked the Bahrainis who dispersed into the village. Smoke was seen from far distances. On Friday a large demonstration was organized by the people under the motto "Chains unite us". The people of Nu'aim were joined by other freedom fighters especially Ma'amir, carrying the pictures of the political prisoners. They were also joined by prominent figures such as Hassan Mushaime, the Chairman of Haq Movement, Nabil Rajab, the President of the Bahrain Centre for Human Rights, Dr Abdul Jalil Al Singace, Sheikh Abdulla Al Saleh and Radhwan Al Amousawi. Riot police waged a ferocious attack on the town causing a state of fear among women and children. On the same day, the people of Sanabis took to the streets in protest against the trial of the

Sitra youth, the continued torture of the detainees and the imposition of the draconian laws on the people.

A young Bahraini, Sayyed Ahmad Sayyed Aqil Al Mousawi was arrested last week from his work place. His father had been targeted by the ruling Al Khalifa family for his anti-regime activities. Nothing has been heard of him since his arrest. There is growing fear for his safety especially as the regime intensifies its policies of terror and torture. Another young Bahraini, Ahmad Kharraz, was also sentenced to six months in jail for taking part in anti-government demonstrations and protest. The people of his town, Wadyan, staged a demonstration to protest his imprisonment. They burnt tyres and exploded cylinders to deter the Death Squads from entering the village. The people of Bani Jamra also joined in the countrywide protests with scores of youth taking to the streets shouting slogans against the hereditary dictatorship.

Bahrain Freedom Movement
28th February 2010