

# BAHRAIN

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

## More failures surround the antiquated regime

The successive developments in terms of human rights and other civil rights and freedoms have convinced most Bahrainis of the futility of the regime's attempts to deceive the people into submission to its will. Following the publication of the extensive report by Human Rights Watch on the return of torture, the scene was set for more international condemnation of the Al Khalifa brutality. Instead of addressing the concerns of the human rights activists, the regime unleashed a programme of deception aimed at diverting the attention away from the ordeals of the prisoners of conscience. No independent inquiry was set up to examine the allegations, and none of the officials accused by the HRW's report as being the main torturers has been brought to justice. Instead, reports have suggested that torture has been continued unabated under direct orders from the royal court. What has angered Bahraini human rights activists is the spirit of revenge possessed by the senior members of the Al Khalifa regime. The victims of torture who had been acquitted by one of the Al Khalifa judges had their acquittal overturned, and a new flat three years prison sentence re-imposed on all the nineteen victims. Security personnel and Death Squads have now been re-deployed in various parts of the country to attempt to snatch the Bahrainis back to torture chambers. Houses have been raided and whole villages ransacked in search for the Bahrainis who refused to hand themselves to the foreign occupiers employed by the Al Khalifa.

The anger of the people has thus continued as they see the chances of any reform, political or otherwise, receding. The subsequent report by Freedom House ranking Bahrain to a much lower status has become inevitable. The ruler has failed to address this new low in the image of his family which is occupying the land with by force. Freedom House has now added more salt to the injury by extending its scrutiny of the Al Khalifa to issue of public freedoms, access to information, the right to choose government and the power to scrutinize the senior members of the ruling family. This is yet another slap in the face of this tyrannical regime. Fur-

thermore, the Al Khalifa regime has been dealt a serious blow following the visit last month to Bahrain of the United Nations Human Rights Commissioner, Navanethem Pillay. She saw with her own eyes the methods of deception adopted by the regime. Even when she was due to see a group of human rights activists, she was politely but decisively prevented from doing so. She was "invited" by the ruler to dine with him instead of attending the pre-arranged meeting. Her aids had to swallow their pride as they proceeded to those waiting for her and offer their "sincere apologies". The UN official was embarrassed as she waited for time to pass before being allowed to go back to her hotel. She would have heard first hand testimonies by the victims of the Al Khalifa torture who had endured vicious treatment by Hamad's henchmen.

The policy of deception continued unabated. The ruler announced the formation of what he called "the national human rights commission" comprising 20 people, mainly those who had supported the regime and defended the use of torture. The aim of the ruler has been to pacify the international concerns with regards to torture. He is unlikely to receive the "praise" he hoped for from the human rights activists. That will make him extremely angry. The new body is expected to tow the line of the Al Khalifa and would be too weak to withdraw from this ineffective tool. Its composition reflects the regime's desire to have conformist voices, not dissenting ones. It is thus a catch-22 for both the regime and its Western supporters. In the past few months several delegations were dispatched to the US in order to pacify the effect of the anti-regime propaganda. Members of these delegations attempted to show their "neutrality" but their efforts have been futile as the tactics of the regime have been exposed. Last month's Hearing session at the Congress has angered the Al Khalifa who have failed to live up to the expectations of the world community. They have remained far behind other countries which have made strides on the way to improve

the well being of their citizens. It is now hoped that with the hanging ropes tightly wrapped around their necks, the Al Khalifa would come back to their senses and allow the drawing up of a people's constitution to replace their tailor-made set of rules imposed by force. The irony is that they dedicated a large portion of the country's resources to promote their political programme as a democratic and progressive one. It is a sign of arrogance and demeaning of others. The reaction by decent people of the world has been to dismiss their claims and counter them by showing the dark side of the Al Khalifa tyranny. The hour of reckoning has thus begun.

The bright side of the ongoing saga is that the Bahrainis have awoken from years of hypnoticism. Over the past four years the country has been plunged into a new era of political dynamism, with daily protests against dictatorship and human rights abuses and international campaigns that have exposed the regime as one of the most brutal in the region. With Sheikh Hamad's programme running out of steam, the regime has thus returned to the dark era of repression. The essence of the counter offensive by the Bahrainis is that they have felt betrayed by a gang of occupation that has ransacked the country and attempted to remove the indigenous people from the map of the earth. Their emissaries to the outside world have been people with sectarian, reactionary and deceptive agendas. Their attempts are doomed, together with the unholy dictatorial regime. Their recent experiences in Washington, London and Geneva are indicative of the limitations of the success of their political agenda. With more young Bahrainis joining the opposition and refusing to be drugged into submission, the end game has begun. It is a game that repressive regimes are not unable to win, but it represents the necessary condition for their eventual downfall. There are only limited hopes of any reform of this antiquated regime. Ten years of absolute institutionalised dictatorship is an open book to all. It has lost the initiative and with it possibly its own existence. Its doomsday scenario has thus unfolded.

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## Abuse, corruption, torture and public anger

As civil unrest continues, so does the tendency to find alternatives to the routine protests followed by crackdown, arrests and possibly more aggression and repression. The latest tactic adopted by the youth in Karzakkan has been the use of whistles in a collective way. The adoption of this method by the people of Karzakkan on Tuesday night (13<sup>th</sup> April) has caused enormous embarrassment to the regime which is intent on crippling the popular resistance. As dust fell on the town, the citizens hurried to use their whistles to transform the area into an arena of noise that alerted others to the deepening political crisis in this troubled country. The people of Karzakkan were protesting against the imposition of jail sentences against 19 people who had been acquitted by the Al Khalifa courts earlier. Among the reasons for the acquittal after it had been established that they had been subjected to severe torture and that their "confessions" had been extracted under torture. The riot police and Death Squads rushed to the area in an attempt to quell the unrest. Some Bahrainis were arrested by the foreign-staffed riot police including two young school boys. These people were randomly picked up as they walked in the streets. They were subsequently released.

At another level the notorious minister of information, Mai Al Khalifa, has banned

the use of the blackberry network to pass the news of unrest in the country. The Bahrain Centre for Human Rights issued a statement condemning this step that would lead to more curtailment of public freedom at a time when the people are calling for wider choice. The ministry ordered the people to obtain its approval before sending any text message from these telephones without the prior consent of the minister. Mai Al Khalifa has become commonly known as the "internet guillotine". Since she took her post hundreds of internet sites have been banned and the ruling family sought to prevent the spread of news about the popular movement that is gradually taking root.

Meanwhile the extent of corruption among the Al Khalifa members has been highlighted by an ongoing case in USA. Since 2008, U.S. prosecutors have been investigating whether Pittsburgh-based Alcoa was involved in bribing government officials in Bahrain in exchange for business in possible violation of the 1977 U.S. Foreign Corrupt Practices Act, according to people familiar with the matter. Prosecutors are looking at Alcoa's relationship with Aluminum Bahrain BSC, a Bahrain government-owned manufacturing company also known as Alba, these people said. Alba has one of the world's largest aluminum smelters and bought raw materials from Alcoa. It is now widely known

that the former Bahraini Ambassador to UK, Khalifa bin Abdullah Al Khalifa, who is currently in charge of the torture chambers, has been implicated in a case of alleged money-laundering. Mansoor bin Rajab, a minister of state at the Al Khalifa cabinet has recently been arrested for allegedly being involved in money-laundering activities. When he pointed a finger at the Al Khalifa torturer, the ruler issued a decree banning the publication of the details of the case. It is clear that the Al Khalifa torturer must be sheltered at any cost.

The above facts relate nicely to the recently-published Freedom House report that gave horrifying details about the downfall of human values decent behaviour in the echelons of power in Bahrain. The 2009 Report published earlier this month painted a gloomy picture of the situation in Bahrain with all indices pointing to the standards in public life showing a free downfall. The report has come only few weeks after the damning report against the Al Khalifa dictatorship and granting it the status of "not free". It also comes only few weeks after the publication by Human Rights Watch (HRW) of a report that confirmed the use of torture against Bahrainis. HRW produced documented evidence to prove the use to torture. Despite this, the Al Khalifa have continued torturing Bahrainis languishing in their cells.

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

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## Bahrain: the ruler who "pardons" then changes his mind

In a serious development the ruler of Bahrain has "revoked" his "pardon" to 19 young Bahrainis who had been acquitted two months ago. The youth had been accused of killing one of the mercenaries in December 2007, but the prosecution failed to produce any credible evidence to support the unfounded allegations. The defendants were forced to sign confessions taken under severe torture. Medical records, court records and lawyers testimonies have confirmed the use of torture with unprecedented cruelty against the Bahrainis. Last month Human Rights Watch (HRW) published a 60-page report detailing the various kinds of torture the detainees had been subjected to during interrogation session. It is now confirmed that some of them were tortured under the direction of Khalifa bin Ali bin Rashid Al Khalifa, the present Bahraini Ambassador to UK who was in charge of the National Security Agency (NSA). The Washington-based HRW used the testimonies of 20 of those detainees to produce the report that had shaken the Al Khalifa hereditary dictatorship to the core.

It is now accepted that those testimonies have infuriated the royal court, especially the present head of the torture apparatus under the NSA, Khalifa bin Abdulla Al Khalifa, the former Ambassador to UK, to order their detention again. To facili-

tate this, the Al Khalifa-controlled supreme court was instructed to repeal the acquittal verdict and order the re-arrest of the tortured Bahrainis. The town of Karzakkan, to which the 19 tortured Bahrainis belong, has been under siege for the past week as the Death Squads carried out raids to arrest the tortured Bahrainis who refused to hand themselves in. Two of them who had been captured are reported to been subjected to more severe torture at the hands of Khalifa bin Abdulla Al Khalifa's torturers.

The revenge attacks by the Al Khalifa have not been confined to the youth. Human rights activists have also been targeted. Mohammad Al Masqati, 28, the President of the Bahrain Youth Organisation for Human Rights, has been targeted for the work he has been doing to defend the human rights of those youth. He has now been ordered to pay 500 Bahrain Dinars (\$1300) for his role in establishing the human rights body. The ruling family has always sought to control such bodies by bringing them under its direct jurisdiction. Those who sought to operate independently have been targeted for revenge and retribution. Other political and human rights activists are expected to be persecuted further under the new policies imposed by the ruler and his son to complete the nationalisation of all political and human rights activities.

On another level, a young Bahraini lan-

guishing at a torture cell has been transferred to the hospital after his condition deteriorated. On Sunday night (4<sup>th</sup> April) Mr Isa Ali was taken from his cell to Sulaimaniya Hospital as his physical and psychological situation became serious as a result of torture. Nothing has been heard of his condition yet. There are serious fears for the well-being of those in custody as the machine of torture led by Khalifa bin Abdulla Al Khalifa has become so vicious and cruel, following the revelations that led to HRW's report.

This torturer's name has also appeared in the case of a minister who has recently been accused of money laundering and removed from his post by a royal decree. Mansoor bin Rajab, a minister of state, was one of the disciples of the ruler before he was targeted by the ruling family for removal. A media campaign was waged against him at the beginning until he threatened to disclose more details surrounding his case. Eventually the name of the torture head, Khalifa bin Abdulla Al Khalifa, was revealed as an accomplice in the money laundering saga. The ruler immediately issued a decree banning any reporting on the case. He feared that more names from within the Al Khalifa ranks would be associated with money laundering.

**Bahrain Freedom Movement**  
8<sup>th</sup> April 2010

## Tom Lantos HR Commission Hearing in the US Congress on HR Situation in Bahrain

Tuesday 27th April 2010

For the first time in its history, the United States Congress held an official on the record hearing on Bahrain on Tuesday 27th April 2010. On the record means that it will be published in the Congressional record and everyone will have access to it. These are the people who attended the hearing as witnesses:

Joe Stork, Human Rights Watch

Stephen McInerney, Project on Middle East Democracy

Mohammed Alansari, Bahrain Society for Public Freedom (defending the ruling family)

Kenneth Katzman, Specialist in Middle eastern Affairs - Library of Congress

Katie Zoglin, Freedom House

The Hearing was chaired by Congressman **James McGovern**, who is the co-chair of the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission (TLHRC) and Congresswoman Donna Edwards who is a member of the TLHRC. Congressman McGovern is the co-chair of the Commission and his attendance has elevated the issue and topic to high circles among the leadership in the Congress.. The hearing started at 12 noon and ended at 1:45pm. The session was well-attended. Many members of Congress staffers were constantly taking notes.

The hearing started with a short remark by Congressman **James McGovern** in which he expressed his concern over the recent political developments in Bahrain especially in the area of torture and undue force against Bahraini political activists by the Government of Bahrain. He indicated that the United States must have a frank and open conversation with its allies against using torture as a policy in the country. Congressman McGovern described Bahrain as a country that takes one step forward in the right direction then two or some time three steps backwards in the wrong direction and authoritarianism. He referred to a report by the State Department where abuses by Bahraini security forces against the demonstrators were clear signs of torture. Congressman McGovern expressed his concern over human trafficking in Bahrain and the rights of the migrant workers in the country. He ended his remarks that the goal of this hearing is to educate the member of Congress on what is going on in Bahrain and how the United States Congress could address the issue to improve the situation and end the use of torture in Bahrain.

Then, Congresswoman **Donna Edwards** gave her remarks in which she indicated her serious concern over lack of respect for Human Rights and use of torture in Bahrain. She also, indicated that she traveled to Bahrain twice as part of her duties as a Congresswoman and visited mem-

bers of the army who are stationed in Bahrain. Congresswoman Edwards indicated that this topic is very important to her because many of her constituents have contacted her seeking her help to protect Human Rights in Bahrain. At the end of introductory remarks she indicated that Human Rights watch report titled "Torture Redux, the revival of physical coercion during interrogation in Bahrain" is of much concern to her and she is looking forward to this hearing to shed light on the issue. Then, she introduced the entire guest speakers and asked Jo Stork from Human Rights Watch to begin his remarks.

**Jo Stork, Human Rights Watch**

Mr. Stork began his remarks by stating that he has been working on issues related to Bahrain for a long time and that he had visited the country numerous times in relation to his work at Human Rights Watch. After King Hamad bin Isa Al-Khalifa took over the rule he initiated political reforms which from the surface looked desirable and something to be admired. However, as years progressed the reality began to look much different from the original much-acclaimed program. Thus, the government of Bahrain had gotten a free ride for some time because of the claim that it adopted genuine political reforms. However, the reality is completely different. The government of Bahrain should revive the momentum on genuine political reforms and the US should use pressure for some practical measures that bring about change in the situation in the country. I was in Bahrain in June 2009 to interview some prisoners who were recently released from the prison under different charges ranging from terrorism to overthrowing the government. We received their testimony and different medical records which indicated physical injuries and we (Human Rights watch) concluded that torture had been used heavily by the government since 2007 in its interrogation methods with political detainees. In addition, the Bahraini government failed to investigate the numerous torture incidents which in many cases led to sexual abuse and violence and threat of raping a family member like the wife, mother, or sister. It was obvious that the torture that was used was meant to

inflict pain and suffering on the political detainee. Mr. Stork added that torture is a very serious crime that is rejected universally and the government of Bahrain should seriously look into investigating these many torture incidents. Therefore, torture is once again part of the official policy in Bahrain. The US government should engage privately and publically with the government of Bahrain and make it clear that torture will not be tolerated even if it comes from an ally. Also, Congress should do more in this regard. Furthermore, the king of Bahrain should be approached personally to seek his intervention to stop torture in the country. Lastly, Mr Stork said that Bahrain is still ruled by an authoritarian government.

**Stephen McInerney**, Project on Middle East Democracy

Mr. McInerney concentrated on political rights and the upcoming elections in Bahrain. He indicated that there is no true sense of citizenship in the country where the majority of the country believes that even if they participated in the political process they don't feel that change will take place because of gerrymandering by the government to their voices. This is a dangerous trend and needs to be addressed. The government in Bahrain was able to use democracy in its advantage to control the society and to consolidate the government power. In other words, in the name of democracy you will not have political rights even if you vote in the elections because we have already controlled one of the two legislative bodies. Also, the Bahraini government moved toward creating a government non-government organization (GNGO) to control the political activities in the country. Also, the government enacted some laws which are very backward and bad for any progress like the political association law. Political parties are prohibited by law but political association is allowed. NDI was recently denied entry to the country because they were going to meet some political activists whom the government did not like; such move gives a clear indication which direction the country is moving toward and that is an alarming trend. *Continued on P4*



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## Urgent Appeal by the The Observatory

April 12, 2010

The Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, a joint programme of the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) and the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT), requests your urgent intervention in the following situation in Bahrain.

### Description of the situation:

The Observatory has been informed by reliable sources about the judicial harassment against Messrs. Sadeq Jawad Ahmed Al-Fardan, member of the Committee of the Unemployed, Sayed Omran Hameed Adnan, member of the Committee Against Tax Deduction of One Percent, Fadhel Abbas Mohamed Ashoor, member of the Committee Against High Prices, and Habib Mohamed Habib Ashoor, member of the Committee for the Release of Political Detainees.

According to the information received, on March 28, 2010, the Court of Appeal sentenced Messrs. Sadeq Jawad Ahmed Al-Fardan, Sayed Omran Hameed Adnan, Fadhel Abbas Mohamed Ashoor and Habib Mohamed Habib Ashoor to three years of imprisonment for the premeditated murder of a policeman and the attempted murder of two of his colleagues and rioting, although they were previously acquitted on October 13, 2009 after a 15-month trial as scientific evidence proved their innocence, in particular the forensic report contradicted the testimonies made by police who witnessed the events.

The Observatory recalls that in April 2008, the four human rights defenders, along with 15 others political activists, were arrested at their homes by Special Security Forces (SSF) under accusations of "burning a State militia car" on April 9, 2008 after they participated in peaceful protests to denounce a wave of arrests of several human rights defenders in Bahrain that took place in December 2007[1][1]. During police custody, Messrs. Sayed Omran Hameed Adnan, Fadhel Abbas Mohamed Ashoor and Habib Mohamed Habib Ashoor were reportedly held in solitary confinement, deprived of sleep and food, beaten and tortured. They were released on October 13, 2009 after the High Criminal Court had recognised their innocence.

The sentence takes place after the release on February 8, 2010 of a report by Human Rights Watch (HRW) on torture in Bahrain entitled *Torture Redux*, which contains testimonies of recent victims, among them Messrs. Sayed Omran Hameed Adnan, Fadhel Abbas Mohamed Ashoor and Habib Mohamed

Habib Ashoor. As of issuing this urgent appeal, no arrest warrant had been issued against them and therefore they remained free.

The Observatory fears that the sentencing aims at protecting police and intelligence officers who have been identified by name as torturers in the HRW report as well as to sanction Messrs. Sayed Omran Hameed

Adnan, Fadhel Abbas Mohamed Ashoor and Habib Mohamed Habib Ashoor's human rights activities, as they were all actively acting for the release of several political prisoners including human rights defenders who were detained in Bahrain by holding talks with the authorities, organising peaceful protests and collecting funds to provide monthly assistance to the families of the detainees.

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## Tom Lantos Commission on Bahrain - *Cont. from P 3*

The government has not yet set a date for the parliamentary election and that in itself is a concern because having a date is essential for outside group to come to Bahrain and to monitor the election. There is no separation of powers; the king has the first and final authority in the country. The parliament cannot enact laws or debate proposed laws unless they are approved by the government. So there is no real power in the legislative body to legislate. I think elections in Bahrain are not going to bring real reforms or real political rights in the country and that leads me to question the Bahraini government commitment to political reforms and political rights.

### Katie Zoglin, Freedom House

We at the Freedom House downgraded Bahrain from partially free to not free. Ms. Zoglin concentrated her remarks on women rights, human trafficking, and domestic violence. She urged the Bahraini government to look seriously into improving women situation in the country especially when it comes to women of domestic violence. Another concern she has was the lack of serious commitment on behalf of the government of Bahrain when it comes to human trafficking and how that still exist as a problem in the country.

Kenneth Katzman, Specialist in Middle Eastern Affairs - Library of Congress

Mr. Katzman submitted the library of Congress report to the committee to be included in the record. Then he began his testimony by pointing to the fact that there is serious manipulation of citizenship that is taking place in Bahrain and the recent arrest and torture claims do not help but raise the concern higher over what is taking place in the country. In some cases that led to serious injury or death. The Shia's make the majority in the country and they are deprived of their rights. In addition, the government always uses the threat of Iran to suppress the Shia even further, although in recent years the Bahraini government signed several energy agreement with Iran. Bahrain is the only non-NATO country that is declared as a major ally to the United States. Beside our fifth navy fleet which is stationed in Bahrain; the United States enjoys a great access to Shaikh Isa air base facility which was great help in the two recent wars; Afghanistan and operation Iraqi Freedom. Also, as a major non-NATO ally Bahrain receives military

and security assistance from the United States. Criticizing the Bahraini government on their Human Rights records should be open and frank. Bahrain always seeks the United States help in upgrading its military equipment also with its old but complicated problems with its neighboring Qatar.

### Mohammed Alansari, Bahrain Society for Public Freedom

It was clear from the beginning that Mr. Alansari was sent by the government to defend it against the massive records of Human Rights violations and torture. He started by stating that Bahrain is in a dangerous region and that requires the government to be careful and very cautious with its moves especially when it comes to political reforms. Then he talked little bit about the geography and the history of Bahrain. Then, he talked about king Hamad bin Isa Al-Khalifa and his political program and how a reformist leader he is. Then he compared the current Bahraini constitution to the making of the American Constitution. Also, he claimed (falsely) that the people of Bahrain with their leader, king Hamad, created the constitution of their country. He claimed that Bahrain enjoys freedom of religion, freedom of speech, freedom of association, freedom of press, and free and fair elections. Also, Bahrain lacks any discrimination based on religion, sect, or ethnicity and the problem is that people in Bahrain are victim of their own perception.

Also, the real danger is coming from Iran through its *Welayat Al-Faqeeh* theory which is followed by many Shia in Bahrain blindly. That is, he said, is a serious concern to the government in Bahrain and it is also a direct threat to the harmony of society in the country. In addition, many Shia clerics who believe in this strict religious theory receive a lot of funding from sources outside Bahrain mainly Iran. He further added that Bahrain enjoys the most level of equality among its citizens. While Mr. Alansari was giving his testimony Congressman McGovern and Congresswoman were really shocked by his remarks and abruptly Congresswoman Donna Edwards stopped Mr. Alansari and asked him to conclude his remarks. It is a clear indication that they knew Mr. Alansari had an agenda to represent the government of Bahrain not to say the truth.