

BAHRAIN

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

UK advised to follow in Lord Avebury's steps on Bahrain

Fundamental change is what the Bahraini native population want to achieve at any cost. Decades of suffering worst kinds of oppression, corruption, marginalisation and injustice, have convinced the people of the need for an alternative to the Alkhalifa hereditary tribal dictatorship. It may seem unachievable in a region that has been ruled by nomadic tribal regimes for decades, but the realities on the ground indicate otherwise. Those antiquated tribal arrangements are now defunct and cannot be sustained for long. They may have been able to remain in power in the past when the British were in full control as a superpower, but the past four decades of "independence" have proven these arrangements incapable of running modern statehood. The end of the Second World War should have convinced Western powers that the world would be safer if it is ruled by democratic regimes which allow people to share power and participate in running their own affairs. But the bloody conflict did not influence the imperialist approach to world affairs. The British Empire which had collapsed left behind a legacy of domination and appetite for exercising influence on those "friendly" statelets. The past four decades have, however, shown that those statelets are incapable of building modern states governed by democracy and respect of human rights.

The UK has not only left behind a legacy of tribal rule, disrespect of human rights and absolute monarchical rule, but it has also retained a great deal of influence on the small sheikhdoms of the Gulf. Bahrain stands out as one of the worst examples of the British moral failure of modern times. While the past had been coloured by security regimes operated by British colonial personnel like Ian Henderson, the present security systems are effectively run by the British "expertise". For the past four years, Bahrain's security services have been trained to be more ruthless, effective in uprooting opposition and subjugating the masses and able to hide their criminal activities against the natives. The British guidance did not outlaw torture or criminalise its proponents, but succeeded in establishing a culture of impunity. It also led to a torture regime that has been able to hide its trails of abuses. Torture is now so widespread but it is not allowed to kill

victims. It ought not be administered inside official jails or interrogation centres. It must not be allowed to be seen or felt by outsiders. If victims are seriously injured under torture they would not be allowed to meet their families or expose their injuries to others. Another way of ensuring that human rights abuses are not exposed is to prevent UN Special Rapporteurs from entering the country. Journalists and human rights activists are barred from entry except under severe scrutiny and surveillance. When four American journalists ventured to visit Bahrain to cover the protests marking the fifth anniversary of the 14th February Revolution, they were arrested and swiftly deported.

Bahrain is now passing through the most difficult situation with uneasy balance between the British-supported Alkhalifa torturers and the native Bahraini people adamant on achieving fundamental political change. In recent remarks by British officials they appear to be insisting on supporting the status quo and refusing to support the pro-democracy activism seeking a democratic transformation in the region. UK's Prime Minister, despite being bogged down in the debate on UK's membership of the European Union, insists on receiving dictators who had used lethal force against the pro-democracy protests such as those of Egypt and Bahrain.

This is despite demands by progressive elements within the UK's political spectrum to change track on both Saudi Arabia and Bahrain. But it now seems more likely that gradual pressure on the British establishment may lead to change of direction and policies on the Middle East. The downturn in Saudi political, economic and military fortunes is beginning to erode Western support to these nomadic dictatorships. The Saudi failure on several fronts, especially in Syria, Iraq, Yemen and Bahrain is causing alarm in Western capitals which are wary of the prospect of increased terrorist threats from groups supported by Saudis and other GCC monarchies. These groups are on the other side of the Mediterranean. Saudis are now a lost cause and must be abandoned. With them are Alkhalifa who have wasted every opportunity to reform their political system, respect human rights and adopt modern style of government.

Bahrainis have shown their resilience and ability to continue their struggle for long time to come. Their activism to mark the fifth anniversary of the Revolution has caught many by surprise. The regime was helped extensively by British security and police experts to pre-empt the protests. Yet the country was brought to a virtual standstill in the days leading to 14th February. The country was turned into a fortress with police barricades, checkpoints and informers at every corner of the areas where the native Bahrainis live. Yet there were more than 50 protests on the anniversary itself. This is despite the crackdown that had preceded that the day with scores of men, women and children detained and tortured. Outside the country, Bahraini refugees and activists staged protests, exhibitions, seminars, press conferences and public meetings in London, Berlin, Paris, Copenhagen, Washington and several Australian cities. Articles were published in major news media criticising both Alkhalifa and British governments policies towards the country. The Alkhalifa further complicated the scene by fielding a candidate to lead the international football federation (FIFA). It provided the opposition with fertile grounds for propaganda and enabled them to further their cause by exposing the torture crimes attributed to senior Alkhalifa figures against athletes. Many articles and reports were produced that exposed the human rights crisis in the country. The British sought to soften the impact of those crimes on the international community and pleaded with the UN to water down its criticism of the Saudi (and Alkhalifa) war crimes in Yemen. The situation is thus becoming more polarised as both sides, the Alkhalifa and Bahrainis, compete to attract the sympathy of the international community. It is a losing game for the Alkhalifa as the world opinion is always against dictators and reactionary regimes. David Cameron's policy must change. He must draw lessons from the late Lord Avebury who passed away on 14th February. He had been a friend for the people of Bahrain and has commanded their respect and affection. UK deserves better political and ethical judgement in line with those adopted by Lord Avebury and different from those of the Cameron's leadership.

Saudis continue to kill Shia Muslims as Alkhalifa deport natives

Yesterday, Saudi troops killed a young man in the town of Awwamiya, in the Eastern Province. The town was attacked by large contingent of military vehicles and troops shooting to kill innocent people. Ali Mahmood AlAbdulla was shot more than 10 times with live ammunition. His body was riddled with more shots after he had died. Twenty six others were injured in the unprovoked attack by Saudi forces on the Shia district. The martyr is of Bahraini origin, and his brother has been languishing in Saudi torture chambers for more than one year. As the killing spree by the Saudi rulers continued, pressure is mounting on USA and UK to stop selling arms to the murderous regimes in Saudi Arabia and Bahrain.

On 17th Feb, US State Department (DoS) issued a statement commemorating the fifth anniversary of Bahrain's pro-democracy uprising in 2011. The statement highlights ongoing US concerns regarding "limitations on peaceful assembly, political activism, and the criminalization of freedom of expression". DoS calls on the Bahraini government to work with the opposition to move forward with reforms, including "the release of opposition figures like Ibrahim Sharif and Sheikh Ali Salman."

In the week 15th-22nd February, at least 31 native Bahrainis, including six children were detained by Alkhalifa members of the Death Squads. At least 22 peaceful protests were attacked using chemical and tear gases. On 21st February a group of youth were detained in house raids: Nader Abdul Karim Fateel and his brother, Ahmad, Hussain Hamza Hussain, Hussain Faisal Hussain, Martadha Mohammad Abdul Nabi, Hussain Kadhem AbdulRedha, Qassim Abdul Hassan and his brother, Mahmood, Ali Hassan Ali Habib

and Ali AbdulHadi AlArab and Fadhel Abbas Kayed. From Tubli young native Ahmad Abdulla Meftah was arrested after being pursued by masked members of Alkhalifa Death Squads. He was taken to the notorious CID torture centre. On 20th February, Saeed Al Singace and Majed Maleeh were detained after a peaceful protest was attacked at AlMusalla Town. From Bani Jamra, Abdulla Al Ghasra, 70, passed away yesterday as he swallowed his pain of having all his children detained by Alkhalifa. His five sons are languishing in torture cell as his funeral awaits their temporary release to take part in his burial.

One week after four American journalists were deported, two people were sentenced yesterday to five years imprisonment for tweeting. Bu Khamis and Hajji Ahmad were given the same prison sentence as that given to the killer of Martyr Hassan Al Shaikh. The killer was subsequently released. Following the arrest and deportation of four American journalists from Bahrain this week, Bahrain Watch can now confirm that the total number of journalists, suspected activists, aid workers and NGO observers that have been denied access to the country is over 250. The journalists deported this week – Anna Therese Day and three members of her camera crew – were in the country with valid visas to report on the demonstrations surrounding the anniversary of the pro-democracy movement.

Continuing their policy of quiet genocide of native inhabitants of Bahrain, Alkhalifa dictators on Monday deported a native Bahraini cleric. Sheikh Mohammad Khojasteh was forcibly banished after Alkhalifa kangaroo court issued the order. His nationality had been revoked together with more than 250 native Bahrainis. Before his deportation to Lebanon, he addressed the

worshippers and said: "The more I feel the pain inflicted on me, the more I feel peace as a member of a community that is being unjustly ruled and treated". Another native Bahraini, Hussain Khairallah was taken to the airport yesterday and may be deported soon after his nationality had been revoked.

Yesterday Amnesty International (AI) issued a public statement entitled Bahrain: Alarming deportations of those stripped of their nationality. AI said it was gravely concerned at the deportation by Bahrain on 21 February of a Bahraini citizen and the confirmation of a deportation order by an appeals court this week of another Bahraini citizen, both of whom had their nationality revoked on 31 January 2015. The organization urges the Bahraini authorities to halt any planned deportations of Bahrainis, allow those who have been deported to return to Bahrain, and to stop any revocation of nationality that would render an individual stateless.

On Sunday 21st February, The Observer newspaper published a long report titled: "Britain lobbied UN to whitewash Bahrain police abuses". It was written by Jamie Doward who said: "Documents shared with the Observer reveal that the UN's criticism of the Gulf state was substantially watered down after lobbying by the UK and Saudi Arabia, a major purchaser of British-made weapons and military hardware." But the UK's role has prompted concern among human rights groups. According to the international human rights organisation, Reprieve, two political prisoners in Bahrain are facing imminent execution and several more are on trial, largely due to confessions obtained through torture.

Bahrain Freedom Movement
24th February 2016

Lord Avebury mourned as 5th anniversary of Bahrain's Revolution marked

The demise of Lord Avebury, the Deputy-Chairman of the Parliamentary Human Rights Group on 14th February has been mourned by Bahraini people who saw in him a friend, a supporter and a champion of human rights. His departure on the day of Bahrain's Revolution added extra significance to his role and attachment to the cause of the Bahraini people. Prayers were recited for his soul in many areas.

The fifth anniversary of Bahrain's Revolution was marked with protests, demonstrations and strikes. The three days leading up to Sunday 14th February witnessed scenes of heroism by the people as they braved one of the most severe crackdowns on people. The regime and its backers flooded the areas where protesters were expected to gather and staged pre-empted arrests. Columns of police vehicles, armoured and ordinary cars with masked members of the Death Squads filled all available spaces near the possible flash points. They were dressed

to kill and maim peaceful protesters. Despite these callous acts people challenged the regime's authority and raised their voices "People want regime change", "Down with Hamad". On 13th February there were at least 46 protests in towns and villages. More were held on 14th.

The crackdown on citizens was unprecedented. At least 89 native Bahrainis were detained including 30 children. This is in addition to erecting barricades and deploying thousands of foreign mercenaries to face the wrath of the natives. On 13th February Abbas Ali was snatched by

plain-clothed members of the Death Squads. After severe torture he was transferred to hospital. On 14th February Mohammad Saeed AlKhabbaz from Abu Saiba' was arrested. On 13th February regime's forces detained under-aged Nasser Younus Nasser from AlMalikiya Town. From Barbar, Mohammad Mahdi Salman was arrested on 13th February. House raids on houses in Sanad Town led to the arrest of Mohammad Jaffar Shamlah, Mahdi Kadhem Hussain, Hassan Abdul Nabi and Ayman Muslim.

Ahead of the 5th anniversary of the Bahrain uprising, Amnesty International issued a storypage on Bahrain with an overview of the human rights situation in Bahrain since 2011 and statistics. In addition, Amnesty International issued a blog entitled 7 stories of shocking injustice: Bahrain after the 'Arab Spring'. It gave a brief account of seven cases of extreme brutality and lack of justice:

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UK urged to stop arming Saudis; Bahrainis mark Revolution's anniversary

Britain has come under renewed pressure to stop arms sales to Saudi Arabia after the UN Secretary General accused the Saudis of indiscriminate bombing in Yemen and said countries such as the UK had a duty to stop the flow of weapons to Riyadh-led forces. Speaking in London, Ban Ki-moon said: "Yemen is in flames and coalition airstrikes in particular continue to strike schools, hospitals, mosques and civilian infrastructure." Ban said permanent members of the UNSecurity Council, including the UK, had a special responsibility to secure peace in intractable conflicts." A special UN panel report, leaked a fortnight ago, accused Saudi Arabia of making numerous breaches of international humanitarian law by conducting an indiscriminate bombing campaign in Yemen. The UK's international development select committee, supported by the Labour party leadership called on the government to suspend all arms sales to Saudi Arabia and set up an independent international inquiry into the allegations made by the UN panel.

On Wednesday 3rd February 2016 The European Parliament (EP) adopted an Urgency Resolution on the case of Mohamed Ramadan, a Bahraini sentenced to death after torture and forced confession. Mohamed Ramadan suffered enforced disappearance. During that time he was tortured until he falsely confessed his involvement in a bombing. The EP called on the Alkhalifa to commute the death sentences of Mohamed Ramadan and all other persons sentenced to death. The Urgency Resolution highlighted the lack of due process and impartiality present during Mr Ramadan's trial and subsequent conviction

In the week 1st-7th February at least 34 native Bahrainis were arrested, including three children and one woman. More than one third of them were taken from the street by masked members of the Death Squads. Today two people from Sitra-Sfalah were detained by masked members of regime's Death Squads. Abbas Ahmad Al Hanan and under-aged Mundiir Ali Saleh were snatched in home raids on their homes Hajj Saeed Mahdi AlHaddad, 61, was detained to serve remaining part of an earlier sentence. He has to stay behind bars 130 days more for opposing the hereditary dictatorship. On 4th February under-aged Salman Hilal was arrested from the courtroom. Eid AlBerry was arrested from the street on 5th February

Eighteen citizens were sentenced to a total of 40 years in jail. Among them is a former MP, Mr Abdul Aal, Photo Journalist AlFardan and Human Rights Activist Zainab AlKhwaja. On 5th February Amnesty International issued an urgent action on behalf of Ahmad Fardan, a

Bahraini photographer, who has had his three month prison sentence upheld and has been re-arrested to serve his prison sentence. Amnesty International considers him a prisoner of conscience and calls for his unconditional release. The trial of 14 other native Bahrainis including Dr Saeed AlSamahiji, Yousuf AlAmm and Khalil AlHalwachi has been adjourned.

The fifth anniversary of Bahrain's 14th February Revolution is being celebrated in several countries as the people prepare to challenge the ruling tribe to allow peaceful expression of opinion and recognise their right of assembly. The regime has flooded the towns and villages with thousands of foreign mercenaries and undertaken pre-emptive steps to throttle the civilians. Bahraini refugees in UK, Germany, USA, Denmark, Australia, Lebanon and Iran have drawn up their programmes that include protests, lectures, exhibitions and public sessions. In Washington there will be a briefing on Friday 12th February at the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission titled: Bahrain: "Repression and the Consequences for Reconciliation" which will be conducted by Senator McGovern.

FIFA presidential candidate Salman Alkhalifa has seen his chances undermined by a series of allegations. His cam-

paign has been dogged from the start by allegations that his tribe perpetrated human rights abuses during the Arab Spring of 2011. Salman is alleged to have chaired a committee whose task was to identify athletes, including footballers, who were involved in pro-democracy demonstrations. He denies this committee ever met. He also denies all accusations of involvement in cases relating to abuse of Bahraini athletes

Yesterday The Guardian published an article arguing that British taxpayers are paying millions to fund a police watchdog in Bahrain that has failed to investigate torture claims in the case of a man who has been sentenced to death. It said: The ombudsman receives the funds as part of a £2.1m package to improve the Bahrain's criminal justice system, which is a key ally of the UK. Tobias Ellwood, the junior Foreign Office minister, told MPs last month that "we encourage all those with concerns [in Bahrain] about their treatment in detention to report these directly to the ombudsman". It added: "Despite a formal complaint from the family of Mohammed Ramadan, a 32-year-old airport guard, the ombudsman has failed to investigate."

Bahrain Freedom Movement
10th February 2016

At Least 250 Journalists/Observers Denied Access

Following the arrest and deportation of four American journalists from Bahrain this week, Bahrain Watch can now confirm that the total number of journalists, suspected activists, aid workers and NGO observers that have been denied access to the country is over 250. The journalists deported this week – Anna Therese Day and three members of her camera crew – were in the country with valid visas to report on the demonstrations surrounding the anniversary of the pro-democracy movement. It appears the authorities were displeased that the journalists had not reported to the information affairs authority who stated that "security authorities detained four U.S. nationals during the incident as a result of their involvement in the criminal acts." This restriction on mobility as well as the way journalists are hunted down, prosecuted and then deported, amounts to an official policy of treating journalists as criminals.

Worryingly, even government sponsored events such as the Manama Dialogue last December in which participants after having arrived in the country, have subsequently been taken from their hotel rooms and deported.

The overall three pronged policy of rejecting visa applications by journalists, refusing entry at the airport and deporting journalists after entering the country is part of a systematic policy to shut down the possi-

bility for independent international media to report directly on ongoing protests and repression in the country; this is effectively a form of censorship and is succeeding both in reducing interest, and increasing the cost and risks of reporting from inside the country.

It is important to note that, in our report, we have not included Bahraini journalists or observers working inside the country, many of whom are jailed and facing sentences of up to 15 years imprisonment. These cases are being advocated for by partner organisations such as the Bahrain Press Association, while our focus here is on border control policies, and containment efforts to isolate events from international scrutiny.

Bizarrely, on 18 February 2016, the Emirati academic Abdulkhaleq Abdullah was denied entry into Bahrain to attend the Gulf Development Forum on Water Security without any reason given. Gulf citizens are allowed to travel to other GCC states without a visa but joint security agreements means that border agencies retain lists of personas non gratas. Freedom of expression simply does not exist in Bahrain.

A full report and analysis of the government's efforts to block access to the country can be found on our website, as well as a complete list of all the 250 cases we have documented.

John Lubbock writes: Lord Avebury's work on Bahrain

The death was announced this morning (14.2.2016) of Eric Reginald Lubbock, Lord Avebury, peacefully, at his home in Camberwell, south London, at the age of 87. He was attended by his wife, Lindsay, and other family members. He had been suffering from Blood Cancer for several years until he succumbed to the disease. The news of Lord Avebury's demise was received by people of Bahrain with sadness and sorrow as he had supported their cause for more than 20 years. Here is an excerpt from an article written by his son, John William, in the Middle Easy Eye on 18th February:

My father started working on human rights in Bahrain in the early 90s, long before most politicians or international media paid it any attention at all. By that point, activists in the country had already been calling for democratic reforms since the 1950s, and it is striking that so little has changed in Bahrain in terms of the rights which citizens enjoy since then.

Eric had done a lot of work in the Middle East prior to the 90s, visiting the Shatila and Sabra refugee camps in Lebanon in 1980 and pressing Arafat's PLO to renounce violence. In the 80s and 90s he visited Massoud Barzani and Jalal Talibani in Kurdish Iraq and attempted to reconcile the rivals (he found Talibani erudite and friendly, Barzani much less so). He also met Abdullah Ocalan in Damascus, trying to persuade the PKK to take part in the Turkish political process as Sinn Fein had eventually done in Northern Ireland.

Throughout the 90s, my father wrote letter after letter to the British government, asking them to raise concerns with the Bahraini government and press them to release political prisoners. His letters from December 1994 to June 1996 were collected in a publication of the Parliamentary Human Rights Group called Bahrain: A Brickwall. Here's a representative sample from December 1995: Nothing has changed since then. In 1999, the Emir died and his son Hamad al-Khalifa took over, promising to be a reformer. The main demand of the opposition then, as now, was to have a constitution that guaranteed meaningful freedom of speech, association, and political representation. Sadly, that is not what the British or American governments want for Bahrain. They want it to be an economically stable place which supports Western interests, and if that means repressing the legitimate demands of the Bahraini people, then that is just a mild embarrassment to their professed interest in promoting human rights.

Hamad proposed a new constitution in 2001 which was approved by 98.4 percent of Bahrainis. Then, with the sleight of hand of a magician, the constitution people had voted on was replaced by a

new one which marginalised the elected part of the legislature, allowing the unelected rulers to retain their power. My father was in Bahrain around this time, and later told me that he had been sitting in a majlis with Hamad as part of his attempts to engage with the government. He told Hamad that creating a truly democratic system would not be easy and required more than superficial reforms. Hamad nodded in agreement, but my father was not convinced of his sincerity.

After the 2011 uprising, Bahrain's rulers hardened their resolve to not give in to any of the reformers' demands. Most of the dissidents who returned to Bahrain in 2002 under a general amnesty were re-arrested and thrown in jail for life, such as Abdulhadi Alkhwaja. Anyone who was involved in the uprising is now either in exile or in jail. My father was a patient man. He knew it took decades for justice to be done, but with Bahrain, he saw a regime that didn't want to change, and a British government that had no interest in making them do so.

That is why he backed the pro-democracy movement so strongly: because nobody else was going to. The truth is that we may never see reform come to Bahrain, at least until the Gulf autocracies are forced to when their

oil runs dry. But that does not mean that anyone fighting to make Bahrain a better society is going to give up, just because it's hard.

The road to freedom is long and hard, and on the way you're sometimes lucky enough to have a guide who helps you carry your burden and show you the way. Eric's example will inspire many people who were following him to pick up the torch he carried, and wherever their torches illuminate injustice for the world to see, my father will be there in spirit.

John Lubbock is a journalist and filmmaker who has recently completed the film "100 Years Later". He is a graduate of International Politics MA at City University London.



Lord Avebury mourned, 5th anniversary marked

1. Ali Abdulhadi Mushaima: Killed during protests but still no justice
2. Hani 'Abdelaziz' Abdullah Jumaa: Shot dead but police officer's sentence reduced
3. Zakariya al-'Asheri: Tortured and died in custody but police walked free
4. Abdelkarim Al-Fakhrawi: Newspaper founder beaten to death in custody.
5. Nazeera Saeed: Journalist tortured by police officers
6. Hussain Jawad: Human rights activist beaten and threatened with sexual abuse
7. Ali Isa al Tajer: Lawyer's brother stripped, beaten and deprived of sleep

The regime's pretensions were unmasked when brave foreign journalists went to Bahrain under cover to witness the events as they unfolded. Four Americans were arrested by regime's forces in a move that was received with disgust at a regime that aims at hiding its crimes in the face of people's bravery. Anna Therese Day and three members of her camera crew were detained on Sunday 14th February, said the organization they work for, the London-based Frontline Freelance Register. The organization, of which Day is a founding member, did not identify the three male captives. Bahrain's dictator subsequently

capitulated under American orders to release them. They were flown out of the country yesterday, to give their eyewitness testimonies to the world.

To mark the fifth anniversary of the brutal government crackdown on mass protests calling for democratic reform in Bahrain on February 14, Human Rights First released a new blueprint that examines conditions in Bahrain, the strengths and shortcomings of the U.S. response, and potential opportunities for the U.S. government to support civil society and strengthen respect for human rights. The blueprint, "How to Reverse Five Years of Failure on Bahrain," draws on dozens of interviews with Bahraini human rights defenders, civil society activists, journalists, academics, families of detainees, lawyers, U.S. government officials, and others.

Outside Bahrain the anniversary was marked by Bahrainis in the diaspora. In UK there were at least 12 activities including protests and seminars. Similar activities were held in Germany, Sweden, USA, Australia, Iran, Iraq and Lebanon.

Bahrain Freedom Movement

17th February 2016