

BAHRAIN

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

Alternative punishment programme; failure from the start

For a small country like Bahrain to have in excess of 4000 political prisoners is beyond imagination. Pressures have been mounting on the regime to release them immediately and conditionally. Allies of the khalifi clan had a rough ride trying to justify their unequivocal support to a regime that has no human principles or values in addition to the absence of constitutional or popular legitimacy. The khalifis were pushed on the issue of the political prisoners, torture and executions. The British, in particular, have been under great pressure to explain their defence of a regime that continues to refuse any visit by the UN Special Rapporteurs, independent press or human rights bodies. Bahrain's dictator was left with no option but to start releasing prisoners of conscience. But he did not want to show weakness in the belief that it would be exploited by the people who have been calling for the downfall of the tribal hereditary dictatorship. So did he do it?

Since the beginning of the year, the khalifi propaganda machine, supported by the intelligence and other branches of the government worked together to market the idea of "alternative punishment". It was presented as a gracious act by the dictator who had committed most heinous crimes against the native Bahraini people. The regime's mouthpieces, GANGOs, agents and spies spread rumours about the plan. In their own ways a programme of deception was waged to encourage some prisoners to ask for these alternative punishments. It was presented as a better alternative to the present imprisonment regime. At the same time the prison officials adopted harsh tactics with the detainees including beating, harassment, nightly attacks, deprivation of sleep, denying sick prisoners much needed medical care, harassment during family visits or calls and enforcing rigid rules to prevent people performing religious duties. The situation inside the torture chambers was turned into hell, thus making any offer by the regime a better alternative. In this environment the dictator presented the alternative punishment programme.

There are several aims behind this initiative. The first is to relieve the khalifi dictatorship from the non-stop criticism from the international community. The second is

to cut the cost of running prisons at a time when the country's revenues are dwindling mainly due to mismanagement but also as a result of the downward trend of oil prices. Thirdly, to pacify the hardline prisoners who would be forced to accept greater restrictions on their movement and activism. Fourthly, to widen the scope of repression as the families of those inmates who accept the alternative punishment would exercise self-censorship in order to avoid any backlash against their loved ones who expected to remain silent and apolitical. Then comes the opportunity of recruiting some inmates who cannot work and earn no real income. Finally the regimes hoped to create serious rifts within the opposition ranks especially when it succeeds to recruit senior figures within this programme. There is still big resistance to the alternative punishment programme as a matter of principle. Many inside the jail have openly rejected the regime's plan. The motto of many is: Never believe khalifi regime or accept any of its initiatives. The sour experiences of the people has immunized the people against serious influences from regime's mouthpieces. In the past few months several people have come to the open to call for the "need for accommodation" with the khalifi dictatorship. But on the other side the experience so far with the alternative punishment has not been encouraging. Serious opposition figures have rejected the proposal. One of them said: Even if we stay 1000 years behind bars we will not compromise on our fundamental rights and objectives. The world is almost unanimous in calling for the release of the political prisoners. The regime has to heed the calls but it is seeking to exploit the issue to its own advantage. This position has been solidified by the haste of the regime to exploit some of the few who had been moved from prison to virtual house arrests. Under the terms imposed on some of these people the person is expected to promote the programme and act to pacify the objectors. They are also expected to praise the dictator as a price for being moved from prison to virtual house arrests. Furthermore the detainees are expected to report to the intelligence department to attend what they call "rehabilitation" session. These arrangements are usually for the extremist elements who need re-indoctrination. What

our political prisoners need is rehabilitation after years of torture, abuse and injustice. The khalifi criminals again want to deceive the world and by pretending to re-habilitate these victims. They summon the released detainees in the same way as they did when they arrested them. Once they are at the investigation department they are taken to what is called "Guidance office". Inside they face intelligence officers and policemen. The sessions often start with assessment of the victim's work. If he is not working, which is the case with most of them, then he is asked to become a spy as a job. If he refuses the officers start to threaten him with re-arrest. If they decide to leave him alone on that point, they turn to his activism. Here the threats are serious: If you are asked to join a protest or writing on the wall, then you must inform us about these people. If you don't, and we discover later your punishment will become worse.

The khalifi tribal regime cannot be reformed. Civility cannot be planted in their minds or behaviour. The only language they use with the native Bahrainis is threats, intimidation and hatred. The aim of the alternative punishment programme is to humiliate the natives and break their will. This is a calculated strategy, planned by foreign experts who have propped up these dictators for years. Human rights experts have repeatedly warned that this support may make these people complicit in the pain inflicted on the people under their dictatorship. For decades these "experts" seconded to the khalifis by their allies in Washington and London have justified their relentless support to these dictators arguing that their engagement is a better strategy to contain their excesses. Experience has shown that the khalifi behaviour is getting more criminal, dictatorial and torturous. The only thing these experts have achieved is to enable the torturers to hide their crimes and camouflage their evil plans to appear civilised, benign and lawful. A fundamental change of the political structure in Bahrain is the only way out of the present crisis which will suck those foreign supporters into the khalifi quagmire.

Bahrain's dictator under international pressure not to kill two natives

Calls by human rights bodies, activists and families of victims have been made to Bahrain's khalifi clan to allow UN Special Rapporteurs on torture, Extra Judicial killing, arbitrary detention, women and children rights, into the country. These calls have come in light of regime's escalation in ill-treatment, abuse and torture of native political prisoners. For more than ten years none of those Rapporteurs has been allowed to inspect the atrocious treatment of Bahrainis at the hands of the khalifis. None of the independent international human rights bodies like Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, IFEX has been granted access to the county. Instead, the regime created several "oversight" GANGOs to further its policy of deception.

Last week the regime's main GANGO on human rights (led by a Jordanian woman) made false claims including that prisoners at the notorious Jau prison were enjoying good treatment and had not complained of abuse. The victims took the unprecedented step of issuing voice messages to the contrary. From Bloc 14 the message was clear; What the GANGO had said was false. Several detainees sent out individual messages to this effect. Naji Fateel, a prominent human rights activist languishing behind bars confirmed his suffering with skin disease, harsh itching and bleeding in various parts of his body. Laith Khalil Al Tawq's voice message also contradicted the GANGO's lies. Another inmate, Hassan Al Sari sent a voice message in which he said that he would start hunger strike if he did not receive treatment. Hussain Ali Ayyad who is serving 15 years for peacefully opposing khalifi hereditary dictatorship has been harassed for exercising his religious rights. Political prisoner, Mohammad Hamid Al

Daqqaq has not communicated or met his family for more than a month and his family is gravely worried about his well-being. The mother of Ahmed Al Asfoor has also called on the khalifi regime to stop the ill-treatment of her son confirming that she had not heard anything from him for several weeks.

On 23rd July 39 French Parliamentarians wrote to Bahrain's dictator calling on him to commute the death sentences passed against Mohamed Ramadhan and Husain Moosa. The letter, drafted by Député Jacques Maire, joins other calls issued by their American, British, Italian, and European colleagues, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and Americans for Democracy & Human Rights in Bahrain (ADHRB) to halt the execution orders against the two innocent men.

On 23rd July also, 53 Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) wrote to dictator Hamad bin Isa al-Khalifa of Bahrain, calling on him to commute the death sentences passed against Maher Abbas al-Khabbaz, Salman Isa Ali Salman, Hussein Abdullah Khalil Ebrahim, Mohammad Radhi Abdulla Hassan, Sayed Ahmed Fuad Abbas Isa Ahmed Al-Abar, Hussein, Ali Mahdi Jasim Mohamed, Hussein Ebrahim Ali Hussein Marzooq, Moosa Abdallah Moosa Jafaar, Hussain Abdullah Marhoon Rashid, Zuhair Ebrahim Jasim Abdullah.

On 23rd July 16 international and Bahraini rights groups said that Bahrain's ruler should commute the death sentences of Mohammad Ramadan and Hussein Ali Moosa. The statement said: The men were not afforded a fair trial and their allegations of torture were not adequately investigated.

Both men said that their confessions were obtained under torture. Neither defendant was able to meet with his lawyer at any time before the trial. "The death penalty is unique in its cruelty and finality, and serious doubt cast on the fairness of the trial should be grounds for commuting the sentence," said Joe Stork, deputy Middle East director at Human Rights Watch. "Bahrain's King Hamad should correct this grave miscarriage of justice and ensure that Hussein Ali Moosa and Mohamed Ramadhan are not executed."

On Monday 27th July The Parisian Ligue 2 club announced the sale of 20% of its shares to Bahrain's tyrant. The news was confirmed by Paris FC. The transaction would amount to 5 million Euros. Pierre Ferracci, the chairman, retains 77% of the capital, the remaining 3% being held by small shareholders. Khalifi dictator also becomes main sponsor of the Ligue 2 team. At the beginning of March Ferracci met Nasser ben Hamed Al Khalifa, one of the sons of the ruler's son. The dictator's empire is already owner of a World Tour (1st Division) Bahrain-McLaren cycling team, bought in December and the Spanish football club Cordoba (3rd division) for 3 million euros. And recently, the khalifis signed an agreement with France for the development of sport, especially football. Unfortunately the European governments have failed to check the source of the money which has been stolen from the public treasury. This is at the time when the country suffers great loss of revenue and extreme financial crisis partly because of Covid-19, decline of oil prices and mismanagement.

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Campaign to stop killing natives, Saudi abuses face international scrutiny

As the furor surrounding the khalifi decision to kill two native Bahrainis gather momentum worldwide, the two victims are now facing more repression in their torture cells. For the past ten days their contacts with their families have been severely restricted. They were often banned from communicating with their families who are dumbfounded by the confirmation of the death sentence ordered by Bahrain dictator. Reprieve, the international body that opposes capital punishment has condemned the khalifi treatment of these innocent native Bahrainis by the khalifi clan. Amnesty International launched an international campaign to stop the executions and urged its members to highlight the case and take part in opposing the khalifi decision.

Parliamentarians in several countries also condemned the khalifi decision to kill Bahrainis. On 13th July the European Union condemned the khalifi execution verdict: This ruling was delivered despite reported concerns on the fairness of the trial. The European Union reiterated its call from 9

January to halt the execution of Mr Ramadan and Mr al Moosa. It further added: We reiterate our call on the Bahraini authorities to establish a moratorium on executions as a first step towards the abolition of death penalty and to commute all pending death sentences. On 15th July US Senator Ben Cardin said: I strongly urge HM King Hamad to pursue clemency for Mohammed Ramadhan and Husain Moosa, given evidence they confessed under torture. Upholding their death sentences in light of this information would be another stain on human rights in Bahrain. On 17th July Senator Marco Rubio Press tweeted: Bahraini courts have reinstated the death sentence for Husain Moosa & Mohammed Ramadan after a unjust trial that included an alleged forced confession. Sen. Rubio urged the Bahrain govt to basic rights of Bahraini citizens & release them.

For more than one week over 500 political prisoners have been on strike protesting the ill-treatment, lack of medical care, overcrowding and absence of proper sanitation. They are mostly from Blocs 13 and 14.

Among their demands: provision of medical care especially for the skin diseases that are spreading fast, to stop shackling political prisoners, ending harassment during family contacts, allowing religious performances and providing sanitation materials at the prison's canteen.

Reprieve, the international body opposing capital punishment has highlighted the case of Saudi political prisoner Mohammed al-Faraj. He was tortured into confessing to 'crimes' linked to non-violent protesting, including attending a funeral at the age of 9. By any measure he was a child when these so-called 'crimes' took place, it said. It further added: He should not have been arrested and he certainly should not be facing a death sentence today. It said: By any measure he was a child when these so-called 'crimes' took place. He should not have been arrested and he certainly should not be facing a death sentence today. On April 26, Saudi Arabia announced a royal decree that would end the use of death sentences for children like Mohammed. Yet, a loophole

Calls to stop execution of two Bahrainis, UK sanctions Saudi torturers

In an emergency meeting called for at the UK's House of Lords today, calls have been made for the UK government to intervene to save the lives of Mohammad Ramadan and Hussain Moosa, the two native Bahraini political prisoners on death row. Anger is spreading among Peers and MPs at the lack of human concern of the Foreign Office which has turned blind eyes to earlier calls to save the lives of several native Bahrainis executed by the khalifi regime. On 6th July Reprieve issued an appeal to save the lives of the two Bahrainis. It said: They were convicted on the basis of 'confessions' obtained through brutal torture - Husain said the pain was so severe he wished for death. We need to make sure the UK speaks up for Mohammed and Husain - before it's too late. Bahrain's leaders need to know the world is watching.

Political prisoners at Bloc 14 of the notorious Jaw prison are appealing for the world to intervene to alleviate their escalating suffering in their torture cells. They have decided to go on hunger strike to protest lack of contacts with their families, inhumane treatment and repressive measures. Hussain Ali Al Sa'di who has 29 years sentence suffers from sickle cell disease and his health is deteriorating. Doctors refuse to see him. One of them referred him to one of the torturers to assess his case. Last week, another political inmate, Mohammad Al Daqqaq was subjected to severe torture and nothing has been heard of him since. He was severely beaten and sprayed with burning chemicals until he passed out. Another political prisoner, Reda Al Alawi has started hunger strike, along with Kumail Al Manami to protest the lack of medical care or treatment. His health is rapidly deteriorating with low sugar level on his second day of strike that

began Sunday 5th July. Hussain Ali, Hamid Al Mahfood and Ayyoub Adel have all complained of being denied medicines for their various ailments.

A refugee granted asylum in Britain is calling on Huddersfield University to end a course teaching police students at a centre in Bahrain where he says he was tortured. The pro-democracy activist fled to Britain two years ago after prolonged interrogation at the country's Royal Academy of Policing, which has been used to extract confessions out of detainees since 2015. The centre is next door to Jaw Prison where inmates have told how they were taken to Building 15 in preparation for their ordeal across the road. Ten have spoken of prolonged torture treatment which included electric shocks, beatings, sexual assault and hanging by the arms. 'For 12 continuous nights I was interrogated,' said the refugee, who last month was granted asylum in Britain and is an engineering student at a UK university. 'I was taken from the cell at night to be questioned in the Royal Academy of Policing. I was getting only 4 to 5 hours sleep each day and was then interrogated all night. I was exhausted and disorientated.'

Hundreds of Saudi military personnel received training at Royal Air Force (RAF) bases in the UK in 2019 - the same year a court banned new exports of British-made weapons to Saudi Arabia over human rights concerns in the Yemen war according to researchers. Declassified UK is the leading website for in-depth analysis and exclusive news on British foreign policy, investigating the UK military, intelligence agencies and its most powerful corporations. It said: Data obtained by Declassified UK from the Ministry of Defence (MOD) shows that 310 Saudis trained at six RAF sites in England and Wales last year. Some training for Saudi pilots is still under way, with courses lasting

up to four years. The data shows that 90 Saudis received "Typhoon training" at RAF Coningsby air base in Lincolnshire, eastern England, during 2019. The MOD refused to clarify how many of the 90 were pilots or ground crew.

On Monday 6th July, Dominic Raab, UK foreign secretary named the first foreign citizens to face visa bans and asset freezes for human rights abuses under Britain's new post-Brexit sanctions regime, with Russians and Saudis among those expected to be targeted. Among the list of Saudi names are Saud al-Qahtani, a former Saudi royal adviser, and Ahmed al-Asiri, a former deputy intelligence chief. Both had charges against them dropped by a Saudi court after 11 suspects were put on a show trial last December over the Khashoggi killing.

On 7th July, UK's International trade secretary Liz Truss said that the government had completed a review of how arms export licences were granted in order to comply with an earlier court ruling suspending sales. Ms Truss said that while some "credible incidents of concern" related to Saudi forces' conduct had been classified as "possible" breaches of international humanitarian law (IHL), the UK government viewed these as "isolated incidents". "The incidents which have been assessed to be possible violations of IHL occurred at different times, in different circumstances and for different reasons," the statement said. The statement adds: "The undertaking that my predecessor gave to the Court - that we would not grant any new licences for the export of arms or military equipment to Saudi Arabia for possible use in Yemen - falls away." Human rights and anti-war campaigners have criticized this decision.

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in this decree means that the judge in Mohammed's case will still be able to sentence him to death.

The Saudis have escalated their pressure on political prisoners and their families. The family of Sheikh Hassan Farhan Al Maliki said that they have had not heard from him or his jailed son, Al-Abbas for almost three months. Other prisoners are also banned from contacting their families. Loujain Alhathloul and Naseema Al Sadah have not contacted their families for at least one month.

As the Saudi monarch continues to cling life at hospital after being admitted two days ago many observers doubt that real reform will follow his demise. Most have painted a gloomy picture of life under his son, Mohammad (MBS) who was implicated in the gruesome murder of Jamal Khashoggi in Turkey in October 2018. The death last week of Saleh Alshihhi - a Saudi Journalist who passed

away after his release from prison has created fear among the families of political prisoners. He had been arrested on 3rd January 2018 after accusing the head of the royal court of corruption. He was released on 28th June and died 20 days later. He is known for speaking out against corruption among Arab regimes, economic and political policies of those countries, including Saudi Arabia. Mr Al Shihi is the second political prisoner to die after leaving jail in the past few weeks.



On 11 May 2020, UN Special Rapporteurs sent a letter to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia regarding the arrest and ill treatment of Sheikh Mohammed Hassan al-Habib and Murtaja Qureiris. The letter was signed by the Special Rapporteur for freedom of religion or belief; the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention; the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression; the Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association; the Special Rapporteur on the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health; the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights advocates; the Special Rapporteur on minority issues; and the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism.

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23rd July 2020

UK accused of 'empty talk' as Bahrain activists face death penalty

Calls intensify for withdrawal from security arrangement with kingdom over human rights

Patrick Wintour, 9 Jul 2020

The British government has been accused of “empty talk” over human rights as two pro-democracy campaigners in Bahrain face the death penalty.

The UK has provided security advice to the island nation in the Persian Gulf for five years and funds a body that examines allegations of police mistreatment.

Mohammed Ramadhan and Husain Moosa, leading figures in the pro-democracy protests of 2011, were arrested in 2014 and accused of killing a police officer. They say their confessions were extracted by torture.

This Monday Bahrain’s court of cassation is widely expected to impose the death penalty, exhausting their final appeal against their convictions.

James Cleverly, a minister in the UK Foreign Office, has resisted intensifying calls for the UK to withdraw from its arrangement with Bahrain, telling MPs on Thursday: “The Bahraini royal family have demonstrated a desire to improve their structures and transparency, and the resilience of their governmental structures. The oversight bodies we support are a part of

that. While they continue to express the desire to improve their structures and head in a positive direction, we will maintain our support to enable them to do so.”

He said the UK would continue to oppose the death penalty regardless of Bahrain’s actions, and that disengagement would not help the cause of human rights in the kingdom. Cleverly also touted the UK’s close relationship with Bahrain as making it possible for the British government to hold “candid conversations” with the king, including to express its opposition to the use of the death penalty.

Harriet McCulloch, a deputy director at the charity Reprieve, accused Cleverly of “more empty talk about Britain’s ‘moral responsibility’ to protect human rights in Bahrain”. She added: “Two Bahraini men are likely to be sentenced to death on Monday, based on false confessions, following a UK-supported whitewash of their torture. It is not enough to have ‘candid conversations’ with Bahrain.”

The level of pressure on the Foreign Office over the fate of Ramadhan and Moosa is unusually high, with ministers forced to come to the Lords and Commons in succes-

sive days to explain what pressure they were applying to save the men’s lives. Calls for a reprieve came from all sides of the Commons, including from two senior Conservatives: Peter Bottomley, the father of the house, and Tom Tugendhat, the chair of the foreign affairs select committee.

Both prisoners claim they were tortured, and Moosa alleges he was hung from the ceiling for three days before confessing. Stephen Doughty, a shadow Foreign Office minister, claimed confessions had been obtained by torture and that the two Bahraini security bodies that allegedly enabled the torture – the Special Investigations Unit (SIU) and the ombudsman for the Ministry of Interior – were funded by the UK government. He asked for positive evidence that UK advice to the SIU and the ombudsman had brought any practical benefit.

“Since 2012, the government have provided over £5m of technical assistance [to Bahrain], yet the number of executions has increased and human rights abuses have increased,” Doughty said.

Cleverly said the two bodies were relatively new and their abolition would be entirely counter-productive.



Bahrain: Halt Executions of Two Men Unfairly Convicted

16 Rights Groups Appeal to King to Commute Sentences

Beirut, 23 July 2020

King Hamad bin Isa al-Khalifa of Bahrain should commute the death sentences of Mohamed Ramadan and Hussein Ali Moosa, 16 international and Bahraini rights groups said today in a joint letter to the king. The men were not afforded a fair trial and their allegations of torture were not adequately investigated.

Security forces arrested Moosa, 33, on February 21, 2014, and Ramadan, 37, on February 18, 2014, on charges of attacking police “with terrorist purpose,” in connection with a bombing that year in the village of Al-Dair that resulted in a policeman’s death. Both men alleged that their confessions were obtained under torture. Neither defendant was able to meet with his lawyer at any time be-

fore the trial.

“The death penalty is unique in its cruelty and finality, and serious doubt cast on the fairness of the trial should be grounds for commuting the sentence,” said Joe Stork, deputy Middle East director at Human Rights Watch. “Bahrain’s King Hamad should correct this grave miscarriage of justice and ensure that Hussein Ali Moosa and Mohamed Ramadan are not executed.” A criminal court sentenced the two men to death on December 29, 2014, and the Court of Cassation confirmed the death sentences in November 2015 but overturned them in October 2018 after a previously undisclosed medical report appeared to corroborate Moosa’s torture allegations. Nevertheless, without further investigation and based on the same evidence, the High Criminal Court of Appeal reinstated the

convictions and death sentences of Moosa and Ramadan on January 8, 2020, and the Court of Cassation upheld them on July 13, 2020.

Under Bahraini law, after the Court of Cassation confirms a death sentence, the decision is sent to the king, who has the power to ratify the sentence, commute it, or grant a pardon. Ten other detainees in Bahrain have been sentenced to death and are awaiting the king’s action.

“Mohammed and Husain have joined ten other individuals whose executions can be ordered with the stroke of the King’s pen,” commented Sayed Ahmed Alwadaei, Director of Advocacy at BIRD. “Bahrain’s allies in Washington and London must make it explicitly clear that there will be consequences if these executions are carried out.”