

BAHRAIN

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

GCC: Fragmentation from within heralds a new era of change

The activism associated with the Martyrs Day last month has illustrated the buoyancy of the natives and their readiness for action at any time and any place. Their consistent approach to the event 26 years after it had been proposed is testimony to their resilience and dedication. On 17th December 1994 two young natives were mowed down by the khalifi security forces while they were participating in a peaceful protest. Hani Al Wasti and Hani Khamis were killed instantly, but became icons for future activism revolving around the concept of civil resistance, martyrdom and sacrifice. Since then that fateful day became a permanent fixture in the Bahraini calendar. Its effectiveness in mobilizing people's activism forced the present dictator to attempt a hijack. Five Six years ago Hamad al-Khalifa announced that he was dedicating the 17th December as Martyrs Day. His intention was to wreck the people's designation of that day. He started to mark the day to remember those who lost their lives while serving khalifi causes. But soon it faltered. For the past sixty years, the 16th December was marked by the ruling family as "Eid Al Julooos" referring to the day when the former emir, Isa al-Khalifa inherited the rule from his father in 1961. The Martyrs' Day had caused enormous damage to the regime's annual celebrations. As the khalifis prepared their programmes for their designated "National Day" Bahraini youths were laying the grounds for their alternative an more sacred programme.

This year there was great enthusiasm for the occasion because it came two months before the tenth anniversary of their popular revolution that had been launched on 14th February 2011. From their diaspora Bahraini activists marked the day with protests, statements and other forms of revolutionary approaches. Inside the country, the youths were mobilized to stage open protests wherever it was possible. In the past years scores were detained, abused and charged with public disorder offences. The parents of the martyrs were at the forefront of public activism to mark the day of their beloved ones who had been mowed down by the khalifi killing machines. The regime has been vicious in dealing with peaceful dissent and is ready to kill and maim anyone who ventures out to the streets in protest against its brutal and dictatorial policies. Yet the families and activists resisted in silence inside

the country. Those Bahrainis who had been forced to the diaspora were more forthcoming in their protests. They raised their voices in the streets, outside the khalifi embassies and expressed their repugnance on the social media. Online seminars were held to highlight the bleak situation in Bahrain and advocate for political transformation. They are aware that human rights cannot be observed by dictators. They also know that the khalifi tribal regime is beyond reform. It is clear that the political direction of the country is pointing to more troubles ahead. Those who support the regime are only helping to prolong the political crisis that has led to great losses of life and even greater human rights abuses. Furthermore the stark political and social polarization is pushing the situation towards the abyss. Several facts are clear to balanced-minded people. The first is that the khalifi regime is an antiquated, hereditary and corrupt dictatorship. Second: The regime is beyond reform. All attempts in the past 100 years to reform it have failed. In the process hundreds of Bahrainis were slaughtered by its cruel security machines. Third: There is a certain eventuality; the khalifi regime will eventually go. No one can stop that happening. Fourth: Those who are keen to prevent more bloodshed among native Bahrainis will decide their position and align themselves with the pro-democracy activists who will leave no stone unturned in their efforts to achieve real political change. Fifth; the political, economic and moral performances of the khalifi regime have been disastrous. The numerous reports by credible bodies confirm the impossibility of reforming what is a fundamentally and inherently corrupt political regime unfit for modern times.

As the Bahrainis welcome the New Year they are full of hope that fundamental change will happen in their country and no power can stop it. The khalifi regime is now a tool in the hands of the Emirati dictator, Mohammad bin Zayed. They were forced to choose between Riyadh and Abu Dhabi and it is clear that they have decided to tow the line of the Emiratis who are becoming more authoritarian and repressive. The collective Saudi-Emirati-khalifi experience in Yemen has not been successful and they are now engaged in rearranging their alliances. The fragmentation of the Gulf Cooperation Council

(GCC) is a serious negative development that will haunt the GCC leaders who feel powerless to stop the rot. Their ill-fated anti-Qatar policy has become a disastrous failure and the attempts to reconcile the GCC have not yielded tangible results so far. They have failed to hold the annual GCC summit which had been scheduled to take place in Bahrain in mid-December. It is now suggested that the Gulf reconciliation initiative has stalled amid Qatari insistence on limiting the rapprochement to Riyadh and Doha. The khalifis have been snubbed and marginalized in the process. The summit is likely to be held in the first week of January in Riyadh, thus denying the khalifis of their wish to host the 41st GCC summit.

Amid these controversies and setbacks, the continued opposition to the khalifi regime is slowly becoming a hard factor in Gulf politics. The rush by the Emiratis and khalifis to normalize relations with Israel has stalled with the Saudis holding against rapid open engagement with the occupiers of Palestine. Only UAE and the khalifis have openly betrayed Palestine and sold out to the enemy of the Arab and Muslim nations. Parallel with this is the fact that in both countries there is a serious lack of consensus on the normalization process. Bahrainis are at the forefront of the national struggle to achieve freedom inside and balanced foreign policy outside. As for links with Israel there is clear public rejection of this unwarranted rapprochement. The likelihood of the success of this initiative is dwindling by the day and those who had hurried to embrace the occupiers of Palestine find themselves now isolated in their own countries. The Bahrainis have not ceased rejection of the occupiers of Palestine and are likely to prove themselves a hard factor in the whole process. The Saudis themselves face internal fragmentation among the princes who have been trapped in the whole process of normalization with Israel. There is rising resistance to this new foreign policy, encouraged by the change in the White House. Undoubtedly the absence of Donald Trump from the White House will lead to big foreign policy changes and the autocratic regimes in the Gulf will be affected. It is time that GCC people rose to the challenges and acted to achieve what is good to the country.

Bahrainis continue march to democracy, Saudis target al-Jazeera journalists

Bahrainis marked the Martyrs' Day on 17th December in their own ways; street protests, public statements; religious services especially at graveyards, seminars and visits to their bereaved families. Several activities were held in London including a protest at Bahrain's embassy, exhibition at Marble Arch and online seminar.

On 16 December 2020, 18 human rights groups including Americans for Democracy and Human Rights (ADHRB), the Bahrain Institute for Rights and Democracy (BIRD), and Freedom House wrote to the president elect of the United States, Joseph Biden, congratulating him on his election and urging him to "ensure the return of democracy and human rights as the center of American foreign policy" amidst the deteriorating political situation in Bahrain. The letter presented the systemic attack on human rights defenders which has only worsened since Bahrain outlawed all political opposition parties in 2017. It highlighted the cases of unjustly imprisoned opposition leaders and HRDs who serve lengthy sentences in overcrowded and unsanitary prisons, suffer torture and ill-treatment, and are "punitively denied adequate medical care". Signatories pointed to the heightened vulnerability of "aging political leaders who suffer underlying health conditions", such as the leader of the political opposition Mr. Hasan Mushaima, amidst the outbreak of Coronavirus. The letter also referred to the increased use of the death penalty in Bahrain, where 27 individuals are currently on death row, 25 of them are "at imminent risk of execution". Nearly half were convicted on the basis of false confessions extracted under torture, with the most recent cases being Mohamed Ramadhan and Husain Moosa.

On 16 December, the European Centre for Democracy and Human Rights (ECDHR)

held a webinar to mark Martyrs' Day in Bahrain. The event, entitled 'Justice for Victims of Extra-Judicial Killings', focused on commemorating those who have lost their lives at the hands of the Bahraini government and to condemn extrajudicial killings, as well as highlighting the ongoing deplorable human rights situation in the country. The event was addressed by four panelists: Jen Marlowe—a Seattle-based award-winning author/documentary filmmaker/playwright and human rights activist, Tara Reynor O'Grady—a human rights defender and consultant from Ireland, Stephen Bell – from Stop the War Coalition and Said Haddadi—Head of Communications at Arab Reform, It was moderated by Irene Gari and Basma Abassi, both advocacy assistants at ECDHR. Former UK ambassador to Bahrain has retired to a lucrative job working at the khalifi-controlled Bahrain's Economic Development Board, headed by the Crown Prince. Often ex-UK officials end up working for Gulf dictators. The message is clear: keeping quiet about human rights abuses will be rewarded.

Calls have been made to stop the attack on individual liberties and privacy of people by Saudi, Emirati and khalifi regimes. This has followed the news that the Saudis had targeted journalists working for Al Jazeera TV network and native Bahraini political and human rights activists. Agnes Callamard, UN Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, tweeted: And more evidence, again, on the unlawful use of surveillance technology: "this time, dozens of Al Jazeera journalists were allegedly hacked likely by UAE and Saudi Arabia using NSO spyware. Dozens of Aljazeera journalists were hacked using Israeli spyware." In 2018 the Amazon billionaire Jeff Bezos had his mobile phone "hacked" by the Saudis.

On his 26th birthday, Reprive, urged people to remember Ali al-Nimr in Saudi jails: It said: It's his sixth year on death row; his eighth locked up in prison. He is there because he was tortured and forced to sign a 'confession' to so-called 'crimes' committed when he was a child. His 'crimes' include administering first aid during a protest. Ali's story is one of injustice. The simple fact is that he should not be on Saudi Arabia's death row... Ali has grown into adulthood on death row. He should have spent these years enjoying his twenties. Today, he should be celebrating his birthday with friends and family.

On 18th December US-based Saudi comedian, Abdulrahman Almutairi, was arrested by American law enforcement officers, according to a video circulating on social media. The social media influencer – who has more than 200,000 followers on Instagram – streamed his arrest by the police live via his Instagram account. Almutairi is an outspoken critic of the kingdom's rulers. The comedian has used his social media presence to condemn Saudi Crown Prince and de-facto leader Mohammad bin Salman, who had made him a target.

Hatice Cengiz, the fiancée of Jamal Khashoggi, has called on the US president -elect, Joe Biden, to release the CIA's classified report into the Washington Post journalist's murder once he enters the White House, a move she said would "greatly assist" in uncovering the truth. The classified intelligence assessment has never been released but media outlets have reported, without providing more details, that it concludes with "medium to high confidence" that the Saudi crown prince, Mohammed bin Salman, had ordered the killing.

Bahrain Freedom Movement
23rd December 2020

Callamard hit at Saudi hit squad, Patel under fire for praising khalifis

Agnes Callamard, UN Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions referred in a recent tweet to a Saudi hit squad to target dissidents. She said: Saudi Arabia deployed a mysterious security team of ten men to Norway. A possible target: Iyad Elbaghdadi. The Norwegian authorities stopped it. A lawsuit filed in Canada last August said that a Saudi hit squad had traveled to Canada. This time, the target was Saad Aljabri, a former top Saudi intelligence official who had worked closely with U.S. officials on counterterrorism in the past.

The European Saudi Organisation for Human Rights (ESOHR) has raised serious concerns about one of the oldest and most senior religious leaders in Saudi jails. Sheikh Hussain Al Radhi has been in jail since 2016 without charge. He is suffering various ailments linked to his old age, especially heart problems. Among the most "serious" crimes he is accused of is criticism in his sermons of the Saudi war on Yemen and condemnation of the execution

of Sheikh Nimr Al Nimr.

A Saudi court has sentenced a prominent Saudi-American medical doctor to six years in prison on December 8, 2020 on vague charges mostly linked to his peaceful political views and expression, Human Rights Watch and The Freedom Initiative said. Saudi authorities have banned Dr. Walid Fitaihi, 56, from travel since November 2017, along with seven members of his family, all of whom are also US citizens. The Saudi government has also frozen his family's assets since 2017. Dr. Fitaihi remains free pending appeal. "Saudi authorities' railroading of Dr. Walid Fitaihi under broad charges shows that the government has no intention of loosening its clampdown on peaceful critics," said Adam Coogler, deputy Middle East director at Human Rights Watch. "The message to Saudi citizens is clearly that any expressed view that contradicts official Saudi domestic or foreign policy will lead straight to prison."

On 9th December native Bahraini orator

Salman al-Arab was detained for a week pending further investigation. He was arrested for his religious views and objective assessment of events and personalities who existed in the early days of Islam. Political prisoner Ayoub Adel Ahmad suffers a broken bone that has not healed for years. Khalifi torturers refuse to provide him with medical care and is left behind bars to suffer in silence. Scabies is spreading among the political prisoners at the notorious Jau Prison. Four years ago almost half of its inmates were infected with the disease. Yesterday Cell No 8 at Bloc 14 was used to isolate the most difficult cases

As the pressures on the khalifi dictators to release native Bahraini prisoners intensify Maryam Al Khawaja, a renowned human rights activist tweeted: My father, a prisoner of conscience & human rights defender AbdulHadi AlKhawaja, and others with him are facing increased restrictions, now with a the number they can call limited to 5. In effect, my father has to choose which of his 3 daughters abroad he can call.

Saudis demolish mosque, detain scholars, outrage at khalifi candidacy for HRC presidency

This week Saudi forces demolished Imam Hussain Mosque in al-Awamiyah where the prayers were led by prominent martyred scholar Sheikh Nimr Baqir al-Nimr before his execution. Local activists said the demolition of al-Awamiyah mosque is not just a political move but a campaign with ideological motivations since al-Saud is a Takfiri (excommunication) regime that excludes Shia mosques from religious venues and refuses to respect them. Ten years ago Saudis were instrumental in destroying about 40 mosques in Bahrain.

Ali al-Nimr's birthday will be on December 20. He will turn 26 years old. He has now been on death row in Saudi jails for five years for 'crimes' linked to protesting when he was only 17 years old - a child. Reprieve has urged people to send him birthday greetings. Despite claiming to end the use of the death penalty for child defendants like Ali he remains on death row eight months later. The uncertainty of his situation is exhausting - for him, and for his family. Knowing that he is spending another birthday unjustly locked away is heartbreaking. Jailed Saudi cleric Salman al-Odah has partially lost his vision and hearing due to medical neglect by the prison authorities, according to his son. Doctors told him that his father had lost half of his hearing and sight.

On 11th December a senior religious scholar from Al Ihsa in Eastern Province was detained. Sayed Hashim Al Shakhs has been repeatedly detained for his political views. His house and the surrounding area were surrounded by heavily armed troops as they prepared to storm the house. This development is a serious escalation of regime's crimes at a time when calls are made for the release of political prisoners including women activists.

Lewis Hamilton, the world's car race champion said he had been moved by a letter from the son of a man facing the death penalty in Bahrain and assured activists that he would not let human rights issues go unnoticed. Campaigners sent letters to the seven-times Formula One world champion last month before the first of two grand prix races in Bahrain. Hamilton had said then that he needed time to digest the content. Hamilton said he had hoped to meet Bahrain's Crown Prince but testing positive for COVID-19 had ruled that out. It has given him more time to read the letters, however. "Ultimately, it isn't necessarily my responsibility to speak out on the places that I don't know everything about but I think we together always have to work to push for change and improvements," he said. "I think the saddest thing for me was that there is a young man on death row and

New trial proceedings have commenced in Riyadh before the Specialised Criminal Court for several activists, including Khaled al-Omair, Mohamed al-Oteibi and those arrested in April 2019, as the Saudi authorities intensify their crackdown. The regime has claimed that some of the women activists languishing behind bars had "passed" secrets to a foreign country. This is rephrasing the fact that some women had spoken to the media outlets such as Al Jazeera. The secrets referred to are the ill-treatment and torture of women political prisoners. Her sister, Lina said: "Loujain's charges don't mention any contact with 'unfriendly' states -- they explicitly cite her contact with the EU, the UK and the Netherlands. Does Saudi Arabia consider them as enemies?" she said.

The human rights world has been angered by Bahrain's attempt to take up the presidency of the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) on behalf of the Asian group. On December 1st, 2020, MENA Rights Group and 20 other NGOs submitted a joint letter to call on the Human Rights Council's Asia-Pacific Group to refrain from considering Bahrain for President of the Council. They said: In the light of the country's deteriorating human rights record, the election of Bahrain would fundamentally undermine the integrity of the Council. The letter cited many reasons for rejecting Bahrain's candidacy for HRC's presidency under these main categories; Systematic violation of human rights, systemic engagement in reprisals and refusal to cooperate with HRC and Special Procedures. The signatories summed up their argument: "In light of the country's deteriorating human rights record and its contempt for both UN treaties and mechanisms, the election of Bahrain to President would fundamentally undermine

the integrity of the HRC. We thus urge member states to oppose Bahrain's nomination, until the government can demonstrate tangible and permanent improvements to the human rights situation in the country."

On 7th December Front Line Defenders issued a statement titled "Bahrain is not a credible candidate for the Presidency of the UN Human Rights Council". It said: the appointment of a Bahraini Government representative to serve as President of the Human Rights Council would seriously damage the credibility of the institution and undermine global efforts to promote and defend human rights. Front Line Defenders urges all members of the Human Rights Council to indicate that a candidate from Bahrain is not acceptable at this time and to ensure that a credible candidate is elected as President of the HRC in 2021. It listed judicial harassment, arrest, detention, imprisonment, torture and ill-treatment among the crimes of the khalifi regime.

A religious scholar has been detained by regime's forces. Sheikh Mahmoud Ashour Al-Sadadi had been summoned to appear at the Police station near Roundabout 17 of Hamad Town where he was arrested. He is accused of holding prayers at his home.

On the occasion of the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, celebrated on 25 November, the Bahrain Center for Human Rights (BCHR) issued a new report in both Arabic and English languages, entitled "Women in Bahrain: Silence Allows Violence". The report addresses the deterioration of the human rights situation in Bahrain, particularly concerning women, and highlights the most serious violations and the laws restricting the freedom of women in Bahrain.

Bahrain Freedom Movement
9th December 2020

it's not clear... when his son writes me a letter, that really hits home. All lives matter. I think there's definitely work to be done in the background. "I definitely won't let it go unnoticed," he added.

UK's Home Secretary is facing criticism after touring a notorious Bahrain police sta-

tion where activists have been tortured. Priti Patel praised the khalif state dictators while she was there for its "progress to achieve common interests". Human rights groups and those who have been mistreated at the General Directorate of Muharrag Governorate Police condemned the visit.

One democracy activist who was granted asylum in the UK after revealing his torture at the station told The Independent newspaper of his frustration seeing Patel photographed there. Yusuf al Jamri told the newspaper: "I can't understand why Priti Patel would pay a state visit to the same police station, flanked by the people who have allowed my torturers to walk free. "How can the Home Office accept that I was tortured at this site, then send the Home Secretary there for a photo opportunity?"

Bahrain Freedom Movement
16th December 2020



Hamilton says Bahrain 'death row' letter hit home

By Alan Baldwin

(Reuters) - Lewis Hamilton said he had been moved by a letter from the son of a man facing the death penalty in Bahrain and assured activists on Saturday he would not let human rights issues go unnoticed.

Formula One F1 - Abu Dhabi Grand Prix - Yas Marina Circuit, Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates - December 12, 2020 Mercedes' Lewis Hamilton in the post qualifying FIA Press Conference FIA/Handout via REUTERS

Campaigners sent letters to the seven-times Formula One world champion last month before the first of two grands prix in Bahrain.

Hamilton had said then that he needed time to digest the content.

Asked for an update ahead of the season-ending Abu Dhabi Grand Prix, Hamilton said he had hoped to meet Bahrain's Crown Prince but testing positive for COVID-19 had ruled that out. It had given him more time to read the letters, however.

"Ultimately, it isn't necessarily my responsibility to speak out on the places that I don't know everything about but I think we together always have to work to push for change and improvements," he said.

"I think the saddest thing for me was that there is a young man on

death row and it's not clear... when his son writes me a letter, that really hits home. All lives matter. I think there's definitely work to be done in the background.

"I definitely won't let it go unnoticed," he added.

"When I get some time now, I will definitely try and speak to those (people) and see how I can positively impact that (race) weekend (in future)."

Sayed Alwadaei, director of the London-based Bahrain Institute for Rights and Democracy (BIRD), said 11-year-old Ahmed Ramadhan had written to Hamilton for help.

His father Mohammed, a security guard, was sentenced in 2014 over the death of a policeman. Human rights groups say the conviction was based on confessions extracted through torture.

Bahrain's government has said the case

met all requirements of a fair trial, and the initial judgment was followed by a second trial that looked into the allegations of abuse.

Hamilton was also sent a photograph, through the Mercedes team, of Ahmed holding a drawing of his racing car.

Hamilton has urged Formula One to do more to push for human rights, saying the issue was a "massive problem" in some of the sport's host countries.

Bahrain's 2011 race was called off due to civil unrest in the island kingdom and the grand prix, the country's biggest sporting event, regularly draws criticism from rights campaigners.

The sport is also set to race in neighbouring Saudi Arabia for the first time next year, a move criticised by Amnesty International.

Formula One chairman Chase Carey said before the Bahrain Grand Prix that the sport was a "force for good" in the countries it visits.

Campaigners have accused the government of using the positive publicity surrounding the race to 'sportswash' the situation.

Alwadaei said Hamilton's latest words were a "watershed moment for international sport."

"When world champions like Lewis Hamilton choose to speak out, lives can change forever," he said.



UK MP raises concerns about political prisoners with khalifi torturers

On 16th December Brendan O'Hara, MP wrote to UK's foreign secretary about medical negligence against Bahraini political prisoners. Here is the letter:

Dear Dominic Raab,

I hope this letter finds you well. I am writing to draw your attention to several recent, very concerning reports of medical negligence against vulnerable Bahraini political prisoners in Jau Prison, Bahrain. These reports were sent to me by the London-based Bahrain Institute of Rights and Democracy (BIRD), and I have attached these reports with this letter.

Dr Abduljalil AlSingace 58, Sheikh Mohammed Habib AlMuqdad 58, and Hassan Mushaima 72 are high profile Bahraini opposition figures who are currently serving lengthy prison sentences after being convicted for their role in Bahrain's 2011 pro-democracy protest movement. In 2012, the UK government stated that it was "very disappointed" by their conviction due to reports, recognised in the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry, that detainees had been tortured, denied access to legal counsel and coerced into confessing.

All three men have a number of chronic

medical conditions and continue to suffer from injuries sustained as a result of the torture they were subjected to in 2011. Consequently, all three are highly vulnerable to Covid-19. The threat posed to prisoners by the coronavirus led a coalition of 19 NGOs, including Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, to urge Bahrain earlier this year to release all imprisoned rights defenders and opposition activists imprisoned solely for peacefully exercising their rights to freedom of expression, assembly, and association.

In recent calls with BIRD, the men have complained of the denial of medical treatment and long delays in receiving neces-

sary medication, which has led to the development of further health complications. Over the last few years, persistent medical negligence by prison authorities has further endangered these men's lives. The issue of medical negligence against AlSingace, Mushaima and Al Miqda have been raised consistently with the British government since their imprisonment in 2011.

In light of these worrying developments, I kindly ask that you urgently intervene with your counterparts in Bahrain to:

Ensure the immediate provision of adequate medical care; and

Secure the immediate release of Dr Abduljalil AlSingace, Sheikh Habib AlMuqdad and Hassan Mushaima, and all political prisoners, activists and those who have been detained or convicted solely for the exercise of the rights to freedom of expression, association, or peaceful assembly.

Please find attached a briefing document on these cases of medical negligence against Political Prisoners.

Yours sincerely,

Brendan O'Hara MP

Argyll & Bute

Chair, APPG Democracy and Human Rights in the Gulf

