

BAHRAIN

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

11th anniversary of Revolution: Regime change is Bahrain's future

As the 11th anniversary of the 14th February Revolution approaches, the people of Bahrain are bracing themselves for more action, stronger resilience and deeper determination to achieve their rights including the right to choose their political system and elect their government. The anniversary is not confined to a day, month or nominal activities, but a necessary point to re-launch the generational struggle and ensure the continuation of the revolutionary zeal to uproot repression and dictatorship. Programmes of action are thus re-invigorated, psychological remoulding is enacted and popular mobilisation is launched. The regime's reaction in the past decade has confirmed its inability to comprehend the enormity of the situation and how its policies have entrenched the people's feeling to achieve fundamental change in the country. So how does the population feel about change? Here are three categories of the social strata who aspire to achieve change:

The families of the martyrs. Those bereaved families have become staunch in their demands for change. Their bereavement over the past decade as they saw the horrific wounds of the mutilated bodies of their loved ones has led to unwavering stands on the path of the Revolution. Those families have different experiences with their bereavement depending on the causes of the death of their loved ones. There were martyrs who were killed while participating in the peaceful demonstrations and protest like Ali Abdul Hadi Mushaima, Mahmood Abu Taki, Ali Al Mo'min, Ali Al Shaikh and Ali Baddah (and Hani Al Wasti, Hani Khamis, Hussain Al Safi and Hussain Al Ashiri in the nineties). They were brutally murdered by the security forces who were implementing the orders from the royal court. Then there are those who were martyred under torture inside the khalifi torture dungeons like Karim Fakhrawi, Ali Saqr, Zakariya Al Ashiri, Abdul Rasool Al Hurjairi and Jassim Makki Mohammad (in addition to Saeed Al Eskafi, Ali Amin Mohammad, Fadel Abbas and Nooh Khalil Al Nooh in the nineties). The third category are those who were executed on orders of the khalifi dictator like Sami Muhaima, Ali Al Singace, Abbas Al Sami'e, Ahmad Al Malali and Ali Arab (and Isa Qambar in the nineties). Those families had deep psychological traumas as

they saw the bodies of their children with bullets wounds fired intentionally by those receiving orders from the khalifi hierarchy. Those families have had no recourse to justice and are determined in their stand to see an end of the khalifi hereditary dictatorship. No amount of money can silence or tame their calls for change.

The political prisoners many of whom have now spent eleven years behind bars for peacefully demanding political change are adamant on achieving this change. They include the senior figures of the opposition like Abdul Wahab Hussain, Hassan Mushaima, Dr Abdul Jalil Al Singace and Sheikh Ali Salman. They have endured horrendous torture, abuse and ill-treatment. For the past decade they were denied proper medical care, interrupted family visits or visual calls, periodic attacks on prison that resulted in injuries and confiscation of property and media campaign to smear their reputation. They have countless stories to tell the world especially those relating to their ill-treatment and torture. While some prisoners opted for the criminal alternative sentencing regime, the leaders have remained steadfast and insisted on political change. They refuse to budge from their stands for which they had been incarcerated for the past eleven years. Many of them were tried by military courts, many lost their relatives and were not able to attend their funerals. Some of them had newly born children when they were detained and did not enjoy them as they grew up from infancy to become teenagers.

This group of the social strata is among the most resilient and insistent on political change. Their sour experiences have taught them one hard lesson: Never again accept silence and allow dictators to run the show. They have become prison-hardened activists who detest the regime and its repressive and criminal policies. Many of them have been repeatedly jailed in their life time and do not wish this political system to remain any longer as their children will face its revenge, recrimination and the fallouts of its absolute dictatorship. The most senior of them are not in a hurry to come out of jail. They do not wish to compromise their fundamental stands in return for marginal personal gains such as reduction of jail sentences. These political prisoners will indeed be-

come a thorn in the back of the khalifis and are likely to be subjected to more physical and political abuse. But they will remain the vanguards of the Revolution and will be instrumental in the destruction of the corrupt khalifi rule.

The issue of the victims of execution is yet another reminder of another group of native citizens who have no place in their hearts to forgive the khalifi dictators. Their families insisted on their innocence and that their killing was in revenge, not as punishment for a crime. None of these victims who were shot by police officers after being convicted by the regime's kangaroo courts are eager to live side by side with the khalifis. Their families have become amongst the most revolutionary citizens who aspire to see the end of the present khalifi regime. There are 12 native Bahrainis on death row for opposing the dictators. They are being treated to bargain with the opposition who have refused to compromise their stands and objectives. They are confident that any such compromise can only benefit the regime and make it more entrenched. What they want is a swift transformation of the political system to represent the people and their aspirations. More people will loose their lives if the present dictators are given the chance to kill and maim innocent people to achieve political objectives. The sooner the khalifis go the less likely will be that the people will continue to suffer. There is a great need for resilience and robust approaches to the Bahraini crisis, the least effective of which is to get along with the regime and abandon the path of struggle to bring the system to its knees.

In light of the above, it has now become clear that the likelihood of a political settlement in Bahrain in the short term is highly unlikely. The people have always rejected the policy of "gracious acts" or the "Open courts" which allow people to vent off their anger without expecting real change. This time the people are adamant to reach their goals. They will not lie down in submission to the dictators, nor will they ever accept the present form of dictatorship to crush the people's revolution that has exposed the real face of the ruling khalifis. There is only one outcome to satisfy the masses: Regime change to end decades of dictatorship and suffering.

Serbia deports Bahraini refugee on UAE jet to face torture

The fate of a native Bahraini citizen is still unknown following his illegal deportation from Europe to face the wrath of a regime notorious for torturing political prisoners. On Monday 24th January Serbia deported Ahmad Jaffar Mohammad Ali, 48 to Bahrain, despite a ruling by the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) specifically forbidding this. He was immediately transferred to one of the regime's torture chambers where heavy-handed interrogation began. He has been denied access to a lawyer and fears are growing for his life. Ali, who had previously been sentenced to life in prison three times and to a further ten years in absentia, applied for asylum in Serbia in November 2021.

Yesterday, Jelena Sesar (the researcher on Balkans and European Union at Amnesty International) tweeted: By deporting a Bahraini dissident who sought protection in Serbia despite ECHR interim measures and the potential risk of torture and political persecution he may face in Bahrain - Serbia blatantly disregarded its obligations under international law. It is also reported that the Bahraini refugee was transported from Serbia to Bahrain on a private UAE jet. If this is true, then the world must awaken to stop the takeover of international bodies by the autocratic rulers of UAE through people like the current Interpol chief.

A lawyer representing a jailed human rights defender in the United Arab Emirates has filed a torture complaint against the new president of Interpol, Maj Gen Ahmed Nasser al-Raisi, as the official made his first visit to the international police agency's headquarters in the French city of Lyon. William Bourdon, a lawyer for the Emirati human rights defender and

blogger Ahmed Mansour, said he filed the complaint against al-Raisi in a Paris court under the principle of universal jurisdiction. Mansour is serving a 10-year sentence in the UAE for charges of "insulting the status and prestige of the UAE" and its leaders in social media posts. Separately, lawyers for two Britons who had accused al-Raisi of torture filed a criminal complaint with investigative judges of the specialised judicial unit for crimes against humanity and war crimes of the Paris Tribunal. One of the first decisions by Interpol after Mr Raisi became its president is the handing of a Bahraini refugee to the khalifis to face torture.

To preempt the preparations to mark the 11th anniversary of the 14th February Revolution the khalifi regime has started summoning native Bahrainis. Jawad Al Shaikh, the father of martyr Ali Al Shaikh and the elderly veteran activist Majeed Abdulla (widely known as Hajji Sumood have been asked to report to one of the torture centres. Another activist and former prisoner, Ali Muhanna had already been summoned. Meanwhile, native Bahrainis have continued their daily protests demanding the immediate and unconditional release of political prisoners. From Sanabis to Maqsha and Shakhoura to Demstan, Karzakkan and Sitra the protests are a reminder of the continuing Bahraini Revolution and the permanent divorce of the people from the regime.

As Dr Abdul Jalil Al Singace completes his 200th day of hunger strike, 27 international NGOs have signed a letter to the US Secretary of State urging him to take a stand in his case. They said: We, the undersigned human rights organizations, are writing to call for the immediate and unconditional release of respected Bahraini academic, blogger, and human rights defender, Dr.

Abduljalil Al-Singace, who is serving a life sentence for his peaceful role in Bahrain's 2011 uprising. They asked Mr Blinken to speak openly about the case and use his diplomatic channels to get Dr AlSingace released.

For the sixth time the khalifi regime has renewed the detention of 6 children, 5 were detained since 27 December. They have been denied family visits, ill-treated. Four of them are 15 years old and two are only 14.

A prominent Bahrain human rights activist and political prisoner is one of three driving forces of the human rights movement who are the Laureates of the 2022 Martin Ennals Award for Human Rights Defenders: Pham Doan Trang from Vietnam, Dr Daouda Diallo from Burkina Faso and Abdul Hadi Al Khawaja from Bahrain. He ignited the quest for democratic and social reform and has sustained his dedication to human rights during ten long years in prison. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Award Ceremony is postponed until June, 2nd 2022.

Saudi political prisoner Mohammed al-Hudaif has been detained since 2016 and is now serving a 13-year prison sentence (increased from an earlier five-year term). His 'crimes' include insulting the UAE and publishing writings deemed hostile to state policy. On Monday 24th January the Specialised Criminal Court in Saudi Arabia postponed the hearing in the trial of ten Nubian Egyptians for another two months, with no new date set. The individuals remain in detention in Saudi jails for exercising their right to free association and assembly.

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26th January 2022

MPs expose immoral UK support of khalifi torturers Murray boycotts Saudi matches over 'sportswashing' concerns

Scholars At Risk (SAR) has called for letters, emails, and faxes respectfully urging the khalifi authorities to ensure Dr. Al-Singace's well-being while in custody, including proper access to medical care and visits with his family, that any charges or convictions related to Dr. Al-Singace's peaceful exercise of protected human rights are lifted, and that in the interim, his case is addressed in a manner consistent with internationally recognized standards of due process, fair trial, and detention, in accordance with Bahrain's obligations under international law. On his 60th Birthday on (15th January) greetings and good wishes were sent to Dr Al Singace who has completed six months of hunger strike. Mary Lawlor UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders tweeted: "Happy Birthday to Abduljalil Al-Singace, who celebrates his 60th from prison. Yesterday, a communication I wrote to Bahrain about his poor health became public. Sadly, there's been no response yet & I've heard

his health has further deteriorated."

For the fourth time, five under-aged children from Sitra Town have had their detention extended for one more week. Mohammad Jaffar Al Kuwaiti, 15, his brothers, Muqtada, 15 and Muntadar, 14, Ahmed Fadel Ahmed Hubail, 15 and Mohammad Abdul Zahra Mansoor, 15 have been in detention since early December. They are held incommunicado with no contacts with or visits from their families.

An investigation by the human rights group Front Line Defenders (FLD) has found that the mobile phones of Ebtisam al-Saegh, a Bahraini human rights defender, and Hala Ahed Deeb, who works with human rights and feminist groups in Jordan, had been hacked using NSO's Pegasus spyware. Both women said the discoveries, which were confirmed by security researchers at the University of Toronto's Citizen Lab, felt like life-changing violations of their privacy, underscoring how such attacks against women were "particularly griev-

ous" given how sensitive information could be weaponised against them.

Leading a debate on the relations between UK and Bahrain at the House of Commons on Thursday 13th January, SNP's Westminster human rights spokesman Brendan O'Hara said when it came to right and wrong, the UK Government's position on Bahrain shows it has "clearly picked which side they are on". Mr O'Hara cited the case of a Bahraini professor of engineering, Dr Abduljalil al-Singace, imprisoned for life in 2011, who has suffered torture and sexual abuse at the hands of security forces. Those who criticise the regime in Bahrain are subject to the most cruel and random treatment. Mr O'Hara said the message was "loud and clear from the minister, that everything that they have done for the last 10 years may have failed, but it is business as usual because human rights abuses is a price worth paying to secure a trade deal with just about anybody". Several MPs talked in some length about the human

MPs to debate use of taxpayers money in Bahrain Amnesty urges Spanish Super Cup clubs to defend Saudi women rights

British MPs concerned about UK support and funding for the government of Bahrain have secured a parliamentary debate on Thursday over political prisoners in that country. The debate comes after revelations that UK taxpayers are funding programmes that support Bahrain's interior ministry and other bodies overseeing detainees. The backbench debate, raised by Scottish National Party MP Brendan O'Hara, will provide scrutiny a decade after Britain began funding Bahrain, and as political prisoners, many imprisoned for their roles in the kingdom's pro-democracy movement, remain behind bars despite cross-party calls for their release. "For far too long, the United Kingdom has chosen to turn a blind eye to widespread human rights abuses in Bahrain, while at the same time sending millions of pounds of UK taxpayers money to the Gulf state to help it 'reform'," O'Hara said yesterday.

Yesterday the Saudis confirmed the death sentence against two native Bahrainis. Jaffar Sultan and Sadiq Thamer were convicted on false charges of possessing firearms. They were arrested in May 2015 on the Bahrain-Saudi causeway and subjected to horrendous treatment and extreme forms of torture. If their appeal fails they will be beheaded and crucified. In their Bahraini town of Dar Kulaib, people took to the streets carrying their photographs and urging the world to force the Saudis to repeal the decision to kill the two youths. The health of Dr Abduljalil Alsingace is worsening by the day. He has been on hunger strike for 185 days demanding the return of his confiscated writings. He is also a torture survivor. He has developed breathing difficulties and is not able to do

any exercise as he feels totally exhausted all the time. His doctors have now indicated that his kidneys are showing signs of dysfunctioning which is a serious deterioration. International pressure is building up on the khalifi dictators to release him immediately and unconditionally.

Former political prisoner, Ali Muhanna has once again been summoned by the torture apparatus for interrogation about his repeated calls to free his son, Hussain. He received two summons in two days. He has relentlessly campaigned for the release of political prisoners, visited their families and participated in peaceful protests for their release. He faces severe retribution from a regime which uses of revenge as a means of silencing dissent.

As the fifth anniversary of the brutal execution of three innocent Bahrainis approaches, the regime has undertaken harsh measures to stop people marking the anniversary. The three victims of the khalifi state terrorism: Sami Mushaima, Ali Al Singace and Abbas Al Sami'e were killed by firing squad on 15th January 2017 following seriously flawed trial that had been condemned by international human rights bodies. Shortly after the killing the executioners purposely sent the blood-soaked garments of the victims to their mothers. Yesterday, Munir Mushaima, brother of one of the martyrs was summoned by the torture apparatus. He had been repeatedly detained and tortured for highlighting the brutal killing of his brother, Sami

Amnesty International has called on the four clubs involved in the Spanish Super Cup in Saudi Arabia this week to take a stand over women's rights and equality issues. Real Madrid, Barcelona, Atletico Madrid and

Athletic Bilbao will compete in the revamped Super Cup in the Saudi capital Riyadh from Jan. 12-16 after the Spanish FA agreed a contract with the Saudis until 2029 that will earn the governing body 30 million euros (\$34 million) a year. The human rights organisation has sent the clubs and the Spanish soccer federation purple armbands and asked the team captains to wear them during the tournament as a show of solidarity. "We are asking your organisation to honour its commitments and responsibilities to human rights," Amnesty urged the clubs "to take advantage of the tournament to make human rights concerns visible in Saudi Arabia. We invite your captain to wear the armband either during matches, or at events around the tournament such as press conferences, training sessions and other public exhibition spaces, including social media."

It has been confirmed that the Saudi authorities arrested writer and researcher Dr Abdullah al-Yahya on 24 December 2021, following tweets he had published criticising normalisation with Israel.

On 7th January Human Rights Watch and the Gulf Centre for Human Rights (GCHR) said that United Arab Emirates authorities retaliated against the detained human rights defender Ahmed Mansoor after July 2021, when regional media published a prison letter he wrote detailing his mistreatment in detention and flagrantly unfair trial. An informed source told the groups that following the letter's publication, UAE authorities moved Mansoor to a smaller and more isolated cell, denied him access to critical medical care, and confiscated his reading glasses.

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12th January 2022

rights violations of native Bahrainis by the khalifis. They include: Sir Peter Bottomley MP (Worthing West, Conservative), Alistair Carmichael MP (Orkney and Shetland, Liberal Democrat), Jeremy Corbyn MP (Islington North, Independent), Margaret Ferrier MP (Rutherglen and Hamilton West, Independent), Jim Shannon MP (Strangford, Democratic Unionist Party), Patricia Gibson MP (North Ayrshire and Arran, Scottish National Party) and Bambos Charalambous MP (Enfield, Southgate, Labour). The only one who defended the khalifi torturers was Bob Stewart MP (Beckenham, Conservative) who accused native Bahraini political prisoners of committing crimes by opposing the hereditary dictatorship and denied that there are political prisoners.

World Tennis champion, Andy Murray turned down huge financial offers to play in Saudi Arabia over 'sportswashing' concerns, according to his representative. The Scottish tennis star was offered to play at

big-money events in Saudi - with some events paying up to \$2 million to top talents. But Murray refused to head to Saudi to compete in lucrative exhibition matches because



We will not get our rights except with sacrifice. Taken from the will of Abbas Al Sami who was executed on 15th Jan 2017

"of what's gone on" in the country over human rights issues.

It has been confirmed that the former legal advisor at the Ministry of Islamic Affairs, Dr. Abdul Rahman bin Yusuf Al-Rahma, has been arrested. In a video clip he had praised Sheikh Suleiman Alwan, who has been in prison since 2004 for visiting families of prisoners and supporting militant groups.

The European Saudi Organisation for Human Rights (ESOHR) is campaigning to secure the release of an elderly Saudi woman unjustly jailed for several years. Aida Alghamdi has been imprisoned for four years, tortured in front of her younger son, Adel and forced to witness his torture in order to pressure her older son, Abdulla, to stop his activism. Her other son, Sultan was released shortly after her arrest on the condition that he attacked his jailed brother for his political activism. The mother who is in her sixties remain behind bars.

Bahrain Freedom Movement
19th January 2022

British MPs call for sanctions against Bahrain officials accused of torture

Dominic Dudley

Several dozen members of the UK parliament have called on their government to impose 'Magnitsky' style sanctions on Bahrain officials accused of torture and mistreatment of political prisoners, with interior minister Rashid al-Khalifa coming in for particular criticism.

The concerns were raised in a debate in the House of Commons on January 13, where there was cross-party criticism of the Bahrain government and its human rights record.

The Scottish National Party (SNP)'s Brendan O'Hara highlighted the case of Abduljalil al-Singace who was arrested in 2010, released but then rearrested the following year after pro-democracy protests. Since then, he has been "subjected to physical and mental torture, as well as sexual abuse, at the hands of the Bahraini authorities," said O'Hara, noting that Reporters Without Borders declared his only crime was "freely expressing opinions contrary to those of the government".

Singace is one of an estimated 1,400 political prisoners being held in Jau prison. Other cases highlighted during the debate included Ali al-Hajee who is serving a 10-year sentence for organising pro-democracy protests, and 74-year-old Hassan Mushaima, a former opposition leader serving a life sentence in the aftermath of the 2011 pro-democracy protests.

O'Hara called on the UK to suspend the Gulf Strategy Fund, which Bahrain has benefitted from. Such demands were echoed by others in the debate. The Liberal Democrat's Alistair Carmichael said "engagement is worthwhile only if we can see progress and a benefit from it, especially in the maintenance in human rights ... The money we spend on countries such as Bahrain must show a rather better return than we have seen so far."

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He also singled out Bahrain's interior minister – describing him as "a man who was responsible for the bloodiest days of the crackdown in 2011" – and asked why the UK government had refused to act against him. Noting previous calls for Magnitsky sanctions against Chinese officials guilty of human rights abuses, Carmichael said "We undermine our good work on China and other regimes if we do not approach governments in places such as Saudi Arabia and Bahrain with equal vigour."

Separately, a parliamentary motion calling for sanctions to be imposed on those responsible for the imprisonment of Al-Singace – who marked his 60th birthday on January 15 – has to date garnered support from 41 MPs, including members of opposition

parties Labour, the SNP, the Liberal Democrats and others.

Limited support

One of the few to voice support for Bahrain in the debate was Conservative Party backbencher Bob Stewart, chairman of the Bahrain All-Party Parliamentary Group. He was one of a number of MPs to recently visit Bahrain and insisted

"Bahrain does not have political prisoners; they are all prisoners who are there because they have committed a crime... I am certain that nobody is in prison simply for disagreeing with the regime."

His claims ran counter to a briefing from the House of Commons Library issued prior to the debate, which said "Over the last decade, Bharani activists, opposition leaders and journalists have faced imprisonment, sometimes after mass trials, for their opposition to the government."

A Bahrain government spokesperson said "There are no political prisoners in the Kingdom of Bahrain, and no person is arrested or is in custody because of their political beliefs or peaceful political activity." They added the government has a "zero-tolerance policy towards mistreatment of any kind and has put in place a robust system to investigate complaints and allegations."

The UK government is not minded to change its approach to Bahrain. Responding for the government at the end of the debate, Middle East and North Africa minister James Cleverly insisted "We are better able to influence change through engagement, dialogue and co-operation... Our close relationship with the Bahraini government and civil society, including non-governmental organisations, gives the UK a privileged position to positively influence developments on human rights." Despite the lack of movement from the UK government, Sayed Ahmed Alwadaei, director of the Bahrain Institute for Rights and Democracy (BIRD), welcomed the debate, saying "MPs were right to denounce the culture of impunity presided over by top Bahraini officials, including Interior Minister Sheikh Rashid al-Khalifa, and I echo their call for Magnitsky sanctions to be applied."

What are Magnitsky sanctions?

The UK first adopted Magnitsky sanctions in July 2020, when it sanctioned nationals of Myanmar, North Korea, Russia and Saudi Arabia for human rights abuses. The term takes its name from Sergei Magnitsky, who died in custody in Russia in 2009 after exposing corruption by officials. Laws have been passed in his name in a growing number of countries, starting in the U.S. in 2012, designed to tackle human rights abuses in other jurisdictions. The UK is currently preparing to launch talks on a free trade agreement with Bahrain and the other members of the Gulf Cooperation Council bloc, but human rights issues do not appear to be on the agenda. "Surely we cannot allow a desire for a trade deal to trample over the moral obligation we have to call out human rights abusers," said O'Hara.

Dominic Dudley is a freelance journalist with two decades of reporting experience



Bahraini, Jordanian women activists hacked with Pegasus

An investigation by the human rights group Front Line Defenders (FLD) found that the mobile phones of Ebtisam al-Saegh, a Bahraini human rights defender, and Hala Ahed Deeb, who works with human rights and feminist groups in Jordan, had been hacked using NSO's Pegasus spyware.

Both women said the discoveries, which were confirmed by security researchers at the University of Toronto's Citizen Lab, felt like life-changing violations of their privacy, underscoring how such attacks against women were "particularly grievous" given how sensitive information could be weaponised against them.

"Since they discovered their phones were infected, they have each been living in a state of daily anxiety and fear. They are especially afraid of the possibility of exposing other female activists and victims they work with, and concerned that their families and friends are now at risk," FLD said in a statement.

According to Citizen Lab's, al-Saegh's mobile device was found to have been hacked at least eight times between August and November 2019 using NSO spyware. It followed various incidents in which al-Saegh, who works for Salam for Human Rights and Democracy, was harassed by Bahraini authorities, including being summoned to a Muharraq police station, being interrogated, physically and sexually assaulted, and threatened with rape if she did not stop her activism, FLD said.

Al-Saegh said the knowledge that she had been hacked put her in a state of "daily fear and terror", and had taken away a sense of security she had felt within her own home, because she now felt that her phone was "spying" on her at all times.