

BAHRAIN

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

Futile political shows will not save a regime devoid of humanity

As part of the policy of deception, the ruling tribe in Bahrain sponsored the conference of the International Parliamentary Union (IPU) last month. In anticipation of more than 1000 parliamentarians from other countries, the dictator and his clique spent lavishly on the event to ensure positive impact on the guests. This is in line of the general policies of the regime to achieve legitimacy from the outside to compensate for the lack of it from within the country. In parallel with the "sportswashing" policy, the event was sponsored to provide a breathing space for a throttled regime that has, over the years, persecuted native parliamentarians. Sheikh Ali Salman, for example, who was the leader of the largest bloc in the regime's "parliament" has completed eight years behind bars after he had been given a life jail term for demanding political reforms. Other parliamentarians had their nationality revoked by the khalifi dictators. In addition to these crimes, Bahrain's prisons hold over 1200 political prisoners, some of them in their seventies. Arbitrary detention, torture and executions are common in a country under the rule of a hereditary dictatorship which survives on subsidies provided by outsiders. These subsidies took the form of financial support, but also other forms of security, military and political support. This support was largely confined to the criminal khalifi family and did not help alleviate the suffering of the people. Instead of making the regime stronger, this support exposed the inherent weakness of the rulers and, most likely, will take them to the abyss. The khalifis have not provided a credible form of government and have, thus lost their credibility alongside their humanity. They do not deserve one more day in power and must go.

Despite the preparations and spending the IPU turned into a farse. Honourable parliamentarians were not swayed by the lavish gifts given by the dictator; their courage and human feelings pushed them to speak out their minds in support of the oppressed people of Bahrain. In this world there are two types of people, including parliamentarians, givers and takers. There were people of principle from Sweden, Norway, Ireland, Iceland and other countries who took to the podium and raised their voices in support of the victims of the khalifi dic-

tators. They paid homage to the victims including those who were martyred by firing squads for opposing the hereditary dictatorships. Simultaneous with the daily meetings in a remote corner of the country, there were the brave Bahraini natives who took to the streets to denounce the bankrupt regime and demand the release of their loved ones, most of whom have languished in regime's prisons for over 12 years. The conclusion of most Bahrainis is that the khalifis have lost their trust and can no longer remain in power. The past 100 years have show a regular pattern of repression, and rarely a decade had passed without innocent people rounded up, detained, torture (sometimes to death), executed, banished or had their nationality revoked. The last cycle of this pattern of repression happened in the nineties. It was followed by releasing the political prisoners and promises of "a new chapter". This was followed, a decade later, by another round of more severe repression. This time, no sensible native will accept anything less than the removal of the khalifi tyrannical rule.

The IPU event coincided with the 12th anniversary of the Saudi-Emirati incursion into Bahrain on 14th March 2011 as they sought to save the regime from imminent downfall. At the time, the people were congregating at the Pearl Roundabout demanding fundamental political changes. The Arab Spring was at its peak engulfing Tunisia, Egypt, Syria and Yemen. The Bahraini were left alone to their fate when the invaders caught them by surprise on that fateful day. The invaders helped to crush the people's revolution, attacking with lethal force those encamped at the Roundabout, arresting the leaders of the Revolution, enforcing martial law and establishing military courts. Later they also helped to demolish the Pearl Statue at the Roundabout that became a symbol of the most active Revolution in Bahrain's history. The occupiers achieved little despite their military superiority. The empty-handed native Bahrainis never succumbed the occupiers, welcomed them or responded to the attempts to quell their revolutionary zeal. They defied the martial laws, continued their protests and paid dearly with their lives. The crushed head of Ahmed Farhan from

Sitra stands testimony to the barbarity of the invaders and their local agents. Bahrainis will never forget their atrocities and will continue their civil resistance movement until the corrupt regime is uprooted.

Where do we go from here? Twelve years on and the people's Revolution lives on. Daily protests have continued unabated, torture chambers remain overcrowded with the victims of the regime and the people stand by their determination to defy the hereditary dictatorship and their backers in Washington, London, Tel Aviv, Riyadh and Abu Dhabi. They are in no mood to compromise on their demands; that the country should be allowed to transform from hereditary to democratic rule. This is a basic and fundamental demand that has been raised and will not be allowed to fade away. The people's experiences under the regime and its bleak record on human rights have sealed their determination to pursue their Revolution. They are convinced that human rights cannot be safeguarded by dictators. The two (human rights and dictatorship) are mutually exclusive. No amount of persuasion or coercion will sway them away from their convictions. The past 12 years have shown beyond any reasonable doubt the resilience of the people, their ability to withstand the regime's oppression and repression and bury their martyrs with pride and honour. It is in the interest of all to denounce the khalifi hereditary dictatorship, help native Bahrainis to determine their destiny, bring the torturers and their masters to justice and allow the people to establish their political system freely and democratically. Continuing to support an antiquated junta is not conducive to domestic, regional or international peace. Courage, human feelings and sincerity to the declared principles of modern world powers are needed to facilitate a swift democratic transformation in this troubled land and help its natives to rise from the destruction and build a modern statehood based on the international laws and conventions. Anything short of this is abetting in the crimes of a criminal who has no regard to human life, international laws and conventions and has forfeited his duties as a ruler.

Bahrain rejects key HRC's recommendations, Saudi women strike in jail

On 24th March The Human Rights Council adopted the Universal Periodic Review outcome of Bahrain. The President said of the 245 recommendations received, 172 enjoyed the support of Bahrain, and 73 were "noted". It was recommended that Bahrain ratify the Convention against Torture and its Optional Protocol, and advance comprehensive legislation against discrimination in all areas. Bahrain should continue to implement the economic vision 2030 and promote sustainable economic and social development. The State should also continue to promote freedom of opinion and expression by making appropriate amendments to the press and electronic media law. It was regretful that Bahrain had only noted and not accepted all recommendations calling on it to admit United Nations Special Procedures; Bahrain needed to reverse this decision. Many speakers supported the adoption of Bahrain's Universal Periodic Review outcome by consensus. The Khalifi regime's rejection of key recommendations is confirmation that it is not fit to rule Bahraini natives who will continue to suffer under this cruel regime.

On Monday 27th March regime's courts confirmed earlier sentences on ten people who had attempted to escape from the khalifi torture chambers. Three have life imprisonment on their head: Ahmad Al Hadi, Ahmad Al Shaikh and Hussain Al Shaikh. The other seven had been sentenced to seven years: Hussain Muhanna, Ammar Abdul Ghani, Hussain Ayyad, Hussain Al Mo'min, Yasser Al Mo'min, Ahmed Al Qubaiti and Aqeel Abdul Rasool. The regime's courts have also renewed the detention of Sayed Ahmed Ra'ed Al Mousawi for further 14 days for holding views on human rights and political reforms that the khalifis reject.

Imprisoned Bahraini-Danish human rights activist Abdulhadi al-Khawaja has again been prevented from seeing a cardiologist on 26th March despite being at serious risk of suffering a heart attack or stroke. The Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders, Mary Lawlor, has reiterated calls on Manama to grant Al-Khawaja access to medical treatment after authorities failed to follow through on his appointment with a cardiologist.

Amnesty International has documented the torture and ill-treatment of at least six Bahraini detainees, including Ahmed Jaber Ahmed whose illness left him unable to walk or dress himself following an 11-month delay in medical treatment. Political prisoners have continued raising their voices against their ill-treatment at the hands of the regime's prison officers. Mohammed Al Raml has begun a hunger strike after they continued to deny him proper medical treatment for his various ailments. Mohammed Abdul Wahid Al Najjar has accused the top officials of giving the green light to the jailers to ill-treat the prisoners of conscience.

The Saudi authorities are pursuing a vicious campaign of arrests and prosecutions against members of the Huwaitat tribe who objected to their forcible eviction in 2020 for construction of Neom project in the North West of the country. They sentenced 14 members of the tribe, including one woman, to prison terms of between 15 and 50 years. At least three more have been sentenced to death for peacefully resisting the forcible displacement of their tribe and speaking out against the injustices inflicted on them by the Saudi authorities. Earlier in the campaign they killed Abdul Rahim Al Huwaiti who had spearheaded the campaign. The authorities have illegally displaced the region's inhabitants, primarily

members of the Huwaitat tribe, without adequate compensation or offering alternative housing.

Saudi Arabia has also sentenced a blind woman, Sakeena al-Othman, to 40 years in prison. Several other women were also handed lengthy jail terms on similar charges including HR activist Salma al-Shehab, who was given a 27-year sentence for tweeting. Meanwhile, Salma al-Shehab and seven other detained women have begun a hunger strike. Salma (a University of Leeds student) was recently sentenced to 27 years in prison over her tweets (reduced from 34) and is among a number of women handed lengthy jail terms on similar charges. They are protesting their detention and sham trial and demanding their release.

It has been reported that the Saudi authorities have detained Sheikh Faraj Al-Suhaibi, who stopped posting on all his social media accounts last October. The arrest surprised many as the Sheikh is mainly concerned with sectarian differences than the regime's policies. Pro-Saudi verified account is brazenly trying to locate a Saudi dissident in London! The same account has threatened to hurt and haunt and hunt the same dissident who defected from the Saudi police this month and took refuge in the UK.

Americans for Democracy and Human Rights in Bahrain (ADHRB) has called on Saudi Arabia to establish strong legislative frameworks. In its presentation at the ongoing session of the Human Rights Council ADHRB said these must be compatible with international human rights law in order to support the rights of freedom of expression, freedom of association and the right to peaceful assembly.

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MPs call for Bahraini prisoners release, F1 criticised for holding Saudi race

Regime's torture apparatus has arrested several people in the past week. Among them was Sayed Ahmed Sayed Ra'id Al Mousawi. He had been summoned to the torture centre where he was detained. The brother of martyr Sami Mushaima who had been executed on orders from the khalifi dictator continues to be persecuted. Few days ago, Munir Mushaima was summoned for interrogation for speaking about the calamity of his family resulting from the unlawful killing of his brother.

Political prisoners have continued to express their grievances and ill-treatment when they call or see their families. Sayed Alawi Al Alawi has described to his family the extent of the horrific ill-treatment meted on the prisoners of conscience. Abdul Aziz Abdul Reda has pleaded to get medical treatment but his calls have not been heeded and remains in a dire medical state. Sayed Abbas Sayed Mahdi also issued a call to get medical treatment

for his severe ailments. Another political detainee, Mirza Qassim Al Durazi has accused the prison officials of denying the prisoners their basic rights and persecuting them. Hussain Aman wrote a letter to the UN High Commissioner urging him to intervene in order to alleviate the continued suffering of the prisoners of conscience and the lack of medical care. Another Bahraini political prisoner is on hunger strike to protest the denial of medical treatment. Miqdad Al-Jazeera has been on hunger strike since March 9 after the cancellation by prison authorities of multiple doctor's appointments and an eye surgery. The political prisoners at Bloc 6 of the notorious Jau prison have continued their protests until their rights have been fulfilled. One of the senior torturers has threatened to call the regime's forces to crush the protests by force. Meanwhile Abdul Wahab Hussain who has been behind bars for over 12 years has called on

people not to ignore the political prisoners saying they deserve care and attention.

Protests have continued in various parts of the country to mark the 12th anniversary of the military incursion by the Saudi and Emirati forces in March 2011. The aim of the aggressors was to crush the people's Revolution that had started one month earlier. They were also marking the arrests of the Bahraini leaders who were rounded up three days after the criminal aggression. From Sitra to Demstan to Sanabis people chanted defiant slogans demanding an end to the illegitimate khalifi regime and calling for the immediate release of the prisoners.

In London, Chris Law MP tweeted: "The 17th March is the 12th anniversary of Hassan Mushaima's arrest. Hassan Mushaima, Abdul Jalil AlSingace and many other political leaders in Bahrain (remain in prison). I express my solidarity with the imprisoned political leaders in

Six Bahrainis arrested, thanks to IPU, Saudis execute father-of-eight man

The conference held by the International Parliamentary Union (IPU) in Bahrain that closes today has proven to be a political failure for the tribal rulers of Bahrain. It became a platform to condemn their bleak human rights record and to call for the release of political prisoners, becoming a public relations fiasco. These were preceded by the revocation of entry visas that had been issued to Human Rights Watch to attend the conference. The event would have marked the first time that HRW representatives had been able to enter the Gulf state since 2012. The 146th assembly of IPU, with the motto "For democracy. For everyone" has embarrassed both the organisers and the hosts. HRW, which has permanent observer status with the IPU and was granted the visas earlier this year, had called for conference attendees to raise concerns about what it called "the serious repression of human rights in Bahrain". The IPU said it was aware the visas had been revoked by Bahraini authorities but did nothing.

Bahrain's hosting of the conference of Parliamentarians was marred by more arrests as well as calls for political prisoners' release. In his speech in the 146th IPU parliament, the delegate from Iceland called on Bahrain authorities to "[release] the Danish-Bahraini citizen Abdul Hadi AlKhawaja, imprisoned since 2011 for using his freedom of expression". Irish Senator G Craughwell said: "I understand that there are 1,400+ political prisoners in Bahrain and the IPU146 is meeting here this week. I guess it's odd that the organisation that represents the democratic parliaments is here. The up side is we get to speak out on." The delegate from Sweden has raised concerns over Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja's life imprisonment, stating that "it is crucial in a democracy to respect the fundamental right of freedom of speech

and the right for the opposition to criticize the government". Senator Petra Stienen of the Netherlands called on the IPU President to publicly denounce Bahrain's decision to revoke Human Rights Watch's visas. Norwegian MP, Gro-Anita Mykjåland called on the Bahraini regime to release Mr Al-Khawaja. So far, IPU has remained silent on this and other human rights abuses.

Bahrain's police have arrested a young man without a reasonable cause. Hassan Khaled Khamis was detained as he returned home from Iraq via the Bahrain-Saudi Causeway. He had traveled to Iraq to visit the holy shrines. Another unexplained arrest happened after a young man had been summoned for questioning by police. Muhammad Mirza Ali Abu Hassan is set to remain in custody until at least March 19 by order of the public prosecutor's office. Four other natives were also detained this week: Qassim Al Hujairi, Ibrahim Al Manna'I, Ali Hassan and Ibrahim Khalil. The arrests are linked to tweets the khalifis did not like. Bahrain's judiciary has handed down prison sentences to at least two defendants. Hassan Al-Sahlawi, who had been locked up for months, got two years for protesting, while Mahmoud Jaafar Al-Baqali was given seven years for undisclosed charges.

Two detained clerics have started hunger strike to protest denial of proper medical care as well as essential religious books. Sheikh Hassan Isa and Sheikh Abdul Hadi Al Mokhowdar are refusing any food until their demands are met. Imprisoned human rights defender, Naji Fateel received expired medication to treat allergy symptoms. He is yet to receive a replacement. Hussain Saleh is suffering acute problems in his eyesight and no treatment has been arranged for him. Political prisoners at Bloc 6 of Jau Prison have protested against ill-treatment, lack of medical care, cancellation of medical appointments and delays in re-

ceiving medicines. On 9th March about 50 prisoners refused to go back to their cells and continued chanting.

On Sunday 12th March the Saudi authorities executed Jordanian national Hussein Abu al-Khair, in callous disregard for the right to life. Al-Khair was accused of drug smuggling, after a grossly unfair trial which relied on "confessions" extracted under torture. Many international NGOs had called for commuting the sentence. During yesterday's Foreign Affairs Questions at UK's Parliament, Sir Peter Bottomley MP and Liz Twist MP raised Saudi Arabia's recent execution of Hussein Abu al-Khair and pressed the government on UK-Saudi policy and what measures are being taken to help halt the execution of others at imminent risk. UK Middle East Minister Tariq Ahmad raised the case of Hussein Abo al-Kheir with Saudi ministers on Saturday. On Sunday, he was executed. Where does this leave future cases that require UK diplomacy?

Last week, the Saudi Special Criminal Court (SCC) sentenced Muhammad Mahmoud Suleiman al-Huwaiti to 30 years in prison. This marks the latest in a wave of harsh sentences handed against members of the Huwaitat tribe for speaking out against illegal evictions associated with the Neom project.

Saudi Arabia has sentenced a blind woman, Sakeena al-Othman, to 40 years in prison. Several other women had also been handed lengthy jail terms on similar charges (including human rights activist Salma al-Shehab, who was given a 27-year sentence for tweeting. This followed the 45-year prison term issued last year against another woman, Noura al-Qahtani, also over her tweets. All of these sentences came after Biden's much-criticised meeting with MBS, which activists warned would encourage worse repression.

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15th March 2023



Bahrain and call for their immediate and unconditional release". Another MP, Martyn Day MP tweeted: "Today marks the 12th anniversary of the unjust arrest of political leaders and human rights defenders in #Bahrain. I demand #FreeHassanMushaima #FreeAISingace and all political prisoners. UK Government, join me in solidarity and call for their release."

The Chief Executive Officer of Formula One Stefano Domenicali has repeatedly defended holding the Saudi Arabian Grand Prix, insisting that it can be an

agent of "positive change". This is undermined, however, by the ongoing and intensifying repression in the country which has reached a new low. The brother of a man executed by the Saudi Arabian authorities last year has accused Formula One of being complicit in "heinous crimes" perpetrated by the state, which he insists is using F1 to sportswash an increasingly oppressive crackdown on dissent. When F1 returned to the Jeddah circuit last weekend it was just over a year since the Saudi state executed 81 men in one day, shortly before last year's grand prix. Mustafa al-Khayyat was one of the 81 men. Last Thursday his brother Yasser al-Khayyat wrote to the F1 chief executive, Stefano Domenicali, asserting that he had been executed for nothing more than taking part in pro-democracy protests. He argued that F1's presence in the Kingdom had emboldened the authorities to act brutally and without compunction. "They use the spectacle of this sporting championship to distract from the murder of my brother

and hundreds of others," he wrote. "The grand prix carrying on as normal, without even mentioning the atrocities that have just been committed on that same soil, legitimises these heinous crimes."

The 20th of March marks six years since the UAE arrested the country's most prominent and outspoken human rights activist, Ahmed Mansoor. He remains imprisoned to this day, held in appalling conditions and serving a 10-year prison term for expressing his views on social media. #The friends of Ahmed Mansoor have called for his release by the UAE government. They tweeted: "Six years ago, on 20 March 2017, Ahmed Mansoor was arrested. He was later sentenced to 10 years in prison on trumped up charges. He is still in prison. He has no bed and almost no access to the outside world. Please be his voice. Urge Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid and Mohammed bin Zayed to free Ahmed".

Bahrain Freedom Movement
22nd March 2023

The Inter-Parliamentary Union, Civil Society and the UK

By Drewery Dyke, March 15, 2023

The Inter-Parliamentary Union assembly Bahrain: what the revocation of observers' visas really signifies

On 8 March, the government of Bahrain revoked the visas of two individuals from Human Rights Watch (HRW). They were set to attend an international meeting of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), which the government of Bahrain (GoB) has been hosting, 11-15 March.

The IPU is the global association of national parliaments. Compared to the relative importance of the gathering itself and the matters that parliamentarians from across the globe are addressing, the exclusion of the two persons from HRW, an organisation with observer status to the IPU, may appear to matter very little.

Not so. A whole morality and standards in international conduct is at stake. This matters to the United Kingdom (UK) parliament, government and civil society, each of whom should take action in their own way.

Civil society in the global order

In the global order envisioned by the United Nations (UN), states enjoy sovereignty limited only by international legal agreement, including in areas such as trade and human rights. The UN accords secondary status to intergovernmental organisations and specialised agencies whose mandates relate to trade, regional governance or other forms of international cooperation or standard-setting. The Inter-Parliamentary Union is one such organisation.

The IPU, in turn, accords permanent observer status to UN agencies; regional intergovernmental organisations, parliamentary assemblies or associations, International political party federations and International non-governmental organisations (INGOs).

The IPU assembly in Bahrain

Today marks the final day of the IPU's 146th Assembly which has been taking place in Manama, Bahrain, 11 – 15 March 2023. The IPU comprises 178 member parliaments, a subset of whom are present in Bahrain. While there, they have been addressing, amongst other issues, promoting peaceful coexistence and inclusive societies and fighting intolerance. Given that its slogan is, "For Democracy. For Everyone" this agenda seems logical.

Yet, its Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians has raised with governments 727 cases of violations of parliamentarians' human rights, of which two are from Bahrain. The GoB arbitrarily stripped the citizenship of one, Jawad Fairouz,

who is now a UK national. By virtue of these cases, as well as the rejection of HRW's access to the assembly, the GoB not only violates the statutes of the organisation but appears to show that it holds in contempt the international order of which it is part.

Answering a question about Mexico for the UK government, on 7 March, MP David Rutley (Conservative, Macclesfield) stated that:

"Democracy and freedom are at the heart of the UK's values and Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) global policy. They contribute to long-term prosperity and security; and democratic societies are the strongest supporters of an open and resilient international order. [...] Support for democratic principles in Mexico is a continuing priority for our Embassy, which regularly engages with the Mexican Government to underline the importance of strong institutions and free and fair elections."

But the work of the IPU is not a governmental one: asked for comment on 15 March, a spokesperson for the FCDO said that insofar as no government minister attended, they had no view about Bahrain's revocation of the visas to the HRW staffer.

While understandable, acts that erode democracy and freedom; and a resilient international order, in a context – Bahrain – where elections are neither free nor fair, must be a concern for the FCDO, if they aspire to apply policy equally and transparently. After all, the December 2022 FCDO's 2021 report on Human Rights and Democracy states that Bahrain is a "priority country". Is it, really?

The British Group [of the] Inter-Parliamentary Union – motto: Advancing the parliamentary dimension of Britain's foreign relations – is believed to have sent a delegation led by MP, Karen Bradley (Conservative), but comprising Labour and Liberal Democrat delegates from both the Commons and House of Lords, as well as administrative staff. While contacted for comment, at the time of writing, the BGIPU had not responded to the question whether they expressed a view over the

revocation of the HRW staff members' visas.

The real price will be paid in Bahrain, by Bahrainis

While the conduct of the GoB erodes the international order and adherence to international human rights standards, the revocation of the HRW staffers' visas is the thin edge of the wedge. Research by Salam for Democracy and Human Rights has set out how the GoB has persecuted 15 former parliamentarians. The authorities arbitrarily detained 11 of them; unfairly charged a further 11; sentenced 10 following unfair trial; tortured 6 of them, deprived 4 of their citizenship while 6 now reside outside the country.

A joint open letter to parliamentarians issued by 22 human rights groups working on Bahrain, on the occasion of the IPU assembly in Bahrain, reminded MPs that in 2016 and 2017, Bahrain's judiciary dissolved two of the country's main political opposition parties, Al-Wefaq and Wa'ad and that political isolation laws introduced in 2018 barred former members of these parties from running for parliament or sitting on boards of governors of civil society organisations. The letter also drew attention to the fact that in 2017, the authorities forcibly closed Bahrain's last independent newspaper, Al-Wasat, and that the GoB has effectively banned all independent media; as well as the November 2022 parliamentary elections were ostensibly the most restricted since parliamentary elections were reintroduced in 2002.

The GoB arbitrarily strips citizenship, continues to use the death penalty; detain prisoners of conscience and appears to turn a blind eye to the use of torture. A range of activists have faced brutal treatment, including torture and denial of medical care. Several of them, including Hassan Mushaima, Dr. Abduljalil Al-Singace, Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja, Sheikh Mohammed Habib Al-Muqdad, Abdulwahab Husain, Naji Fateel, and Sheikh Ali Salman, have been sentenced to life in prison. A Danish-Bahraini dual citizen, Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja, has been denied surgery that he requires to treat his jaw,

broken by security forces when he was arrested for taking part in the 2011 pro-democracy protests.

For these reasons, civil society – a pillar of the global order – is perhaps right to be dismayed at the muted response by the IPU in relation to the revocation of the HRW staffers' visas and by what appears to be silence by the BGIPU; as well as be disappointed at UK's FCDO's lack of engagement – when Bahrain is a stated human rights "priority country". The IPU assembly ends today.

