

# BAHRAIN

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

## **Bahrain's political prisoners resort to hunger as weapon of change**

For decades Bahrain's prisons have been notorious for their sub-standard conditions in terms of sanitation, medical care and the inhumane treatment of inmates, especially if they are political. For the past half a century, prisoners have been calling for better conditions. They appealed to the prison officers, the political leaders and even to the elected members of the National Assembly in the seventies. Their calls have not been heeded. Even when international bodies visited the prisons such as the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and asked the regime to improve the conditions, only limited improvements were made. Since 2011 when Bahrain's prisons became overcrowded with native youths, men and women, the situation has become worse with attacks on the prisoners cells, beating the sleeping prisoners and confiscating their property. The situation continued to deteriorate until the prisoners rioted in 2015. The khalifi reaction was vicious. They ordered their henchmen to attack the native Bahraini detainees causing enormous injury and pain. Some of the victims were not allowed visits for several months until their wounds were healed. The attacks on the prisoners of conscience never ceased. These attacks intensify when the prisoners insist on exercising their rights for religious congregation in Ramadan or Muharram. The khalifis hate to see these events being marked by the prisoners who are the spearhead of the political strife.

The officers adopted a policy that they had been given by outside powers who are defending the regime. Any wrong doing must be done in secret, no evidence may be allowed to be seen by the outside world, always deny wrong-doing and no family visits until all wounds have healed. Inmates were tortured to death, suffered diseases until death, humiliated, denied social and religious rights and subjected to various acts of revenge. Religious scholars had their turbans kicked. Some of them were forced to crawl on their feet to kiss the feet of their torturers. Disabled people like Dr Abdul Jalil Al Singace were severely abused; Dr Al Singace's crutches were taken away from him and he was forced to crawl to the bathroom. They were denied family visits repeatedly. Some prisoners did not see their children who were born

after their imprisonment until they were five. What has been annoying the families most is the erection of glass barriers to separate the native Bahraini prisoners from their families during visits. Fathers were not allowed to touch or kiss their children. When some of them became ill they were denied proper medical treatment. Inmates with teeth pain were denied pain killers and made to suffer in silence. When the conditions of some prisoners became desperate, they were released to die with their families outside prisons.

For so long Bahraini native prisoners were denied their basic rights as inmates. Despite their numerous protests their calls to improve their conditions have not been heeded. Their decision last month to go on hunger strike is a sign of total despair. Food is one of the most precious habits of mankind, in fact all living creatures. For a person to stop eating willingly requires a serious reason. When they decided to stop taking food many people and human rights bodies in Bahrain and outside began to appreciate the desperate situation. It was a shocking event to many, especially the families who feel pain as their loved ones starve themselves in protest at their conditions. Some families and good-hearted people tried to stop the action but failed. The prisoners have reached a situation where life and death became of equal significance. To live under these dire conditions represents a slow death. It must be borne in mind that these detainees are people of honour and pride. They were the people at the forefront of the political movement that sought change in the country after decades of oppression and dictatorship. They were the people who had the courage to face the tanks and heavily armed soldiers of the regime when they went out with vengeance in 2011 and subsequent years to raise the banner of freedom and to challenge the absolute hereditary dictatorship. Some of them were gunned down by the khalifi forces or mercenaries, many others wounded and scores were subsequently executed. For them, nothing remained of this life when the best of the people were denied the right to live honourably by a bunch of perverted people who insist on clinging to power at any cost, outside the realm of constitutional or people's legitimacy.

The people of Bahrain have always felt that the "free world" had abandoned the principles of humanity, democracy and human rights. None of the countries which are known for their unwavering support of the khalifi dictators has ever cared about the rights of Bahrainis to determine their future, write their own constitution or form their own government. These countries have offered lip service to their founding principles of liberty and dignity and have placed their material and economic interests above any other human considerations. It is intriguing to see how world peace may be secured when whole people are denied their basic political and human rights. The people who have engaged in the hunger strike are also protesting the absence of the political will among the world's leaders to champion a programme of political change that secures the minimum rights to people who are striving to live with dignity. The Bahrainis ventured to make their voice heard by those powers, hoping that the use of hunger as a weapon will awaken up those who have abandoned their human duty and conscience. It is not easy to refrain from eating, which is an intrinsic desire among the members of the human race. But they felt that they had exhausted all means at their disposal to make their voice heard. When some of them revolted in 2015 at Jaw prison they were treated harshly by the prison officers who had received direct orders from the notorious royal court. They paid dearly when the vicious torturers attacked them in their cells, beating and torturing many of them. The fear remains that similar treatment may be meted out this time also. This is why the international community has been alerted to the hunger strike and the possible vicious reaction by the khalifi dictators. As the time clock ticks, anxiety among some of the prisoners and their families starts to sit in. The hope is that the Western allies of the khalifis (especially in Washington and London) are urged stop the khalifis from committing more crimes against the native majority Bahrainis. The next few weeks or months will bear witness to what the khalifi vicious dictators will do with those using their hunger as their main weapon as they are forced to defend themselves.

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## Political arrests intensify in Bahrain, Saudis kill Ethiopian refugees

As the political strife continues in Bahrain, the khalifi hereditary dictators have intensified their repression. On 21st August native Bahraini youth, Mohammad Hassan Al Qassab, from Abu Saiba, was arrested in a vicious raid on his home. His belongings were also confiscated. From Abu Quwwa town Sayed Mohammed Sayed Majed was also detained in a house raid. His personal belongings were confiscated by the attackers who ransacked the place.

As hundreds of political prisoners continue their hunger strike for a third week, domestic and international support for the prisoners has been pouring in. Over 700 prisoners are taking part in this unprecedented strike with several of them collapsing every day. The temperatures in the country are very high while the regime continues its refusal to listen to their humble and reasonable demands. Many are determined to continue their action as their families and activists intensify their support. Many of the strikers say they are continuing their action. Jaffar Naji Ramadan said he was continuing his hunger strike until the demands are met. Another political detainee, Sayed Ahmed Sayed Mahdi said: We are on hunger strike because we are denied our rights and religious freedom. Fourteen NGOs have written to the UK's foreign secretary urging him to intervene in the case of the Bahraini political prisoners. The European Parliament has called for their release especially the sick.

Fears are growing for the life of a senior political and religious figure. Last week, Sheikh Mirza Al Mahroos was rushed to hospital from his prison cell after his health had deteriorated. He is suffering from various ailments including heart condition. Mo-

ammed Hassan Al Raml was rushed to hospital after he suffered stomach bleeding. Another prisoner, Abbas Abd Ali Hussain was also taken to hospital two weeks after he started his hunger strike. They are all victims of repression and medical negligence.

The case of the political prisoner, Ahmed Jaffar who had been handed by the Serbian authorities to the khalifi tortures remains a mystery. Last week he was transferred to solitary confinement after he protested his situation and presented some demands. He was subjected to horrific torture in recent days. On his 2nd day of hunger strike, he was pepper sprayed in the face, his hands and legs tied, then he was thrown into solitary confinement. The use of solitary is one of the reasons for the mass hunger strike.

On 18th August A dozen human rights groups called on US President Joe Biden to press Bahraini authorities to immediately release Abdul-Hadi al-Khawaja. He one of Bahrain's most prominent human rights defenders, who was imprisoned in 2011 for leading peaceful protests seeking fundamental freedoms. They called for his immediate and unconditional release. On 17th August Amnesty International issued an Urgent Action calling for the release of al-Khawaja. It said: Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja is a prisoner of conscience who has been arbitrarily detained since 2011. He must be immediately and unconditionally released.

The US-based Freedom House has also called for his release: We again call for the immediate & unconditional release of Abdulhadi al-Khawaja, Bahraini-Danish human rights defender and winner of our

2012 Freedom Award. Al-Khawaja launched a hunger strike two weeks ago. We are deeply concerned about his rapidly deteriorating health.

The invitation extended by the UK Government to the Saudi notorious crown prince is causing a backlash and dismay amongst human rights bodies. Alqst, a Saudi NGO said it is "dismayed at the UK Government extending an invitation to Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince and de-facto leader, Mohammed bin Salman. This does a grave disservice to Saudi human rights victims and further emboldens the authorities to commit gross violations with impunity."

On 21st August, Human Rights Watch (HRW) said in a report that Saudi border guards shot people attempting to cross the border at close range, and in some cases asked them which of their limbs they would prefer to be shot. People who attempted the journey described seeing "women, men and children's bodies strewn across the mountainous landscape severely injured, already dead and dismembered", according to HRW. The 73-page report, which is based on witness interviews and analysis of photos, videos and satellite imagery going back to 2021, builds on a mounting body of evidence of serious human rights violations along the Saudi Arabia-Yemen border. Saudi authorities are spending billions on sports-washing to improve their image. Yet out of public view, Saudi border guards killed 100s of Ethiopian migrants and asylum seekers trying to cross into Saudi Arabia, including women and children,

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## Arrests on Bahrain's Independence Day, Saudis detain two influencers

On Monday 14th August Bahrainis marked the Independence Day to mark the withdrawal of the British forces from the country which was completed on that day in 1971. People staged demonstrations against the continued British support of the khalifi dictatorship that was imposed on the country. In London, the Bahrain Opposition Bloc organized several events including a protest outside the khalifi embassy, a picture exhibition at Marble Arch and a seminar at TSSA centre in London.

The strike by the political prisoners at Jaw Rehabilitation and Reform Center has escalated. The Centre is a facility holding many of the prisoners identified by human rights activists as dissidents who oppose the rule of the Al Khalifa family. The political prisoners have presented four main demands: An end to the isolation of the prisoners held in Building 3 and others placed in buildings with criminal prisoners in violation of their classification; Increasing the time allowed outside the cell (which is now only one hour every day) and to allow prayers in congregation at the building

mosque; Amended visit rules to relieve constraints like glass barriers and allow non first-degree relatives and Provision of proper medical care and access to education.

There has been strong support among the people for the prisoners strike. Native Bahrainis staged demonstrations and protests at several towns including: Al Sahla Al Janoubiyah, Nuwaidrat, Karzakkan, Demstan, Bani Jamra and Sanabis. Also several people outside prison went on hunger strike in solidarity with the political prisoners. They include Sheikh Ghazi Al-Sammak and local activist Ali Muhanna. Sayed Ali Alawi from Saar Town also joined the hunger strike under the motto: We have rights. He said the hunger strikers will not end their action until their demands are met. At least 15 of them have collapsed due to a sharp drop of sugar levels in the blood. On Sunday, a group of religious scholars called on able members of the public to join the mass hunger strike at Jau Prison. Ten detained political leaders signed a statement supporting the action by the prisoners including: Abdul Wahab Hussain, Hassan Mushaima,

Dr Abdul Jalil Al Singace and Abdul Hadi Al Khawaja.

Political prisoner Ahmed Saleh Ali said: the detainees are falling one after the other as a result of the strike. Ali Sangoor who has spent over 10 years behind bars said that the prison officials are denying them medical care for the ailments that they themselves had caused. Majid Ashoor and Isa Hassan blame the prison officials for the ailments that could result from the hunger strike.

Meanwhile, the khalifis have escalated their attacks on the political prisoners. Yesterday Ahmed Jaffar was transferred to solitary confinement one day after beginning his hunger strike. He had been handed by the Serbian authorities to Bahrain two years ago. Mohammad Hassan Al Raml, 63, was rushed to hospital after his medical condition had become critical.

On another front, regime forces have raided several homes and detained native Bahrainis in revenge for their support of the mass movement against the khalifi dictatorship. In a raid on his home in Duraz,

## Hundreds on hunger strike in Bahrain, Quayle lobbies for Saudis

Hundreds of Bahraini political prisoners in Jaw Central Prison are continuing an open-ended hunger strike, to demand their rights. The strike comes after regime's officials ignored their demands and continued to violate their rights with unfair decisions such as solitary confinement, neglect of health care, deprivation of the right to education, visits, and congregational prayers. In a joint statement, the political detainees confirmed that the prisons administration, with direct guidance from the Bahraini authorities, has clamped down on them, depriving them of the most basic rights that even prisoners of war enjoy, and violating the international covenants and its written constitution. In early March 2023, the Bahraini Al-Wafaq Society highlighted in a report that more than 14,000 cases of arbitrary arrest have taken place in Bahrain since 2011, noting that security campaigns and violations affected 15 former MPs, who were targeted by the authorities in Bahrain over their stances on freedom of expression.

Political detentions have continued unabated in Bahrain. At least five people have been arrested for taking part in a protest against the repeated desecration of the Quran in Europe. The protest followed Friday prayers in Duraz town. Among those detained are three activists, Ali Muhanna, Abdulmajeed Abdulhasan, and Munir Mushaima. Mohammed Fadel Ali from Al-Markh town and Sayed Ali Sadiq were detained for one week.

Meanwhile the conditions of the political prisoners have continued to deteriorate. The family of political prisoner, Mahmood Hassan says that he suffers severe form of psoriasis (irritation of the skin) and is in need for immediate treatment. Another political detainee, Ibrahim

Al Samahiji also complains of lack of treatment that is causing him severe pains. In a video message political prisoner, Habib Ali Al Fardan who is seriously ill has talked about his doomed life saying: If these are my final hours I like to spend them with my elderly mother, wife and only daughter who lost her father when she was eight. Now she is 10 and may lose her father.

Death row inmate Mohamed Ramadhan has been thrown into solitary confinement for exposing the torture of another prisoner and for speaking out about the ill-treatment he himself endured. His wife said that she lost contact with her husband. She said: I was informed by an inmate that he was transferred to solitary confinement since Monday 1st August, for exposing prison abuse in May. Reprieve which campaigns against capital punishment said: Three years ago James Cleverly promised to "publicly and loudly" raise the case of torture survivor on death row Mohamed Ramadhan and "seek to have [his death sentence] set aside". Today we learn that Mohamed has been transferred to solitary confinement for the 2nd time in four months.

Following another execution on 3rd August, the Saudi authorities have now executed over 81 individuals in 2023. Almost half of them were sentenced to death on the basis of ta'zir (the judge's discretion) that involves beheading. Between July 2022 and March 2023, the Specialised Criminal Court of Appeal upheld death sentences against Jalal al-Labad, Abdullah al-Derazi, Hassan al-Faraj, Youssef al-Manasef and Ali al-Mabiyouq, and the Criminal Court in Tabuk that of Abdullah al-Huwaiti. All six are now at imminent risk of execution, pending final rulings from the Supreme Court. In October 2022, the Specialised Criminal Court also handed down death sentences against Jawad Qureiris and Ali Hassan al-Subaiti that are

currently under appeal. Meanwhile, the prosecution is calling for the death penalty against Mahdi al-Mohsen too.

A Saudi man sentenced to death over his participation in anti-government protests in 2011 has launched a hunger strike after he was denied access to a public prosecutor, as his legal options to avoid execution run out. Saud al-Faraj, a 42-year-old businessman and father, was convicted in 2022 of participating in demonstrations in Qatif in the Eastern Province of Arabia, on trumped up terrorism charges.. Faraj has long denied the charges, saying that his confession was a result of torture. He was moved via wheelchair in and out of the prison hospital between interrogation sessions, and held in solitary confinement for 21 months, among other allegations.

Democracy for the Arab World (Dawn) has urged the US Department of Justice to investigate ex-congressman Benjamin Quayle and his lobbying firm over its ties to LIV Golf. Quayle is potentially downplaying Saudi Arabia's human rights violations while reportedly lobbying for LIV Golf, which is financed by Riyadh's Public Investment Fund. Quayle is the son of the 44th US vice president, Dan Quayle. The report also suggests that Ben and his lobbying firm, Hobart Hallaway & Quayle Ventures (HHQ), might have breached US regulations by not registering lobbying activities for LIV Golf with the US Department of Justice, as required for representatives of a foreign government. "Ben Quayle and his partners at HHQ have chosen to contribute to and benefit from the Saudi government's gross human rights abuses by lobbying for the Saudi Public Investment Fund- owned LIV Golf," Sarah Leah Whitson, Dawn's executive director said.

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Jawad Mirza Al Durazi was arrested yesterday. From Al Markh town, Sayed Ali Sayed Sadiq was also arrested and remanded in custody for one week. Two other native Bahrainis from Al Ekr town were also detained: Abdulla Shawqi and Maitham Al Mughanni.

In the 2023 Press Freedom Index Bahrain ranked 171st, making it one of the ten worst countries in the world in terms of press freedom and freedom of expression. This, in itself, is an indictment of a regime intent on denying the natives their basic freedoms, especially that of speech and opinion. Over 95 percent of the 1300 detainees were arrested because of their opinion that they had expressed in various ways including statements and protests.

The human rights prominent activist, Abdul Hadi Al Khawaja has been transferred to hospital suffering from irregular heart beats. For 12 years, Al-Khawaja has been unjustly imprisoned, tortured and denied necessary medical treatment. He is on yet another hunger strike protesting inhumane prison conditions. Doctors worry he may

not survive. "Abdulhadi may not survive... for more than a few days" said Dr. Damien McCormack from Ireland who has been following Al Khawaja's situation for years. On 14th August Mary Lawlor UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders said: "I'm very worried by recent reports on Abdulhadi Alkhawaja's health, as he spends a 12th year in prison for his peaceful defence of human rights in Bahrain. Adbulhadi should not be in prison. He should be released."

A prominent Saudi scholar and Snapchat influencer has been arrested by Saudi authorities which is evident of the kingdom's extreme crackdown on social media users. The arrest of Mohammed Alhajji, a public health expert who completed his dissertation in the US, follows the disappearance and recent arrests of other prominent influencers for "crimes" that include the perceived criticism of the crown prince, Mohammed bin Salman, and support for women's rights. There was no indication of why the influencer – who was seen as apolitical and sup-

portive of the Saudi government – was detained. Alhajji had been scheduled to speak at an event in Riyadh on Sunday, but observers noted that a tweet describing the event had been deleted in recent days.

On Thursday 10th August a popular orator from the Eastern Province, was also detained. Mustafa Al Faraj, the brother of Aqeel Al Faraj who was executed in March 2022 together with 80 others in one day, was arrested from his workplace.

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# Bahraini prisoners are on hunger strike, the latest sign of simmering unrest

This satellite photo from Planet Labs PBC shows the Jaw Rehabilitation and Reform Center near Jaw, Bahrain, July 26, 2023. Bahrain prison inmates are taking part in a hunger strike over conditions there, activists and authorities said Wednesday, Aug. 9, 2023, the latest sign of simmering unrest in the island kingdom a decade after the Arab Spring. (Planet Labs PBC via AP)

BY JON GAMBRELL

August 9, 2023

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Inmates at a Bahrain prison are on a hunger strike over conditions there, activists and authorities said Wednesday, the latest sign of simmering unrest in the island kingdom a decade after Arab Spring protests.

The strike is underway at the Jaw Rehabilitation and Reform Center, a facility holding many of the prisoners identified by human rights activists as dissidents who oppose the rule of the Al Khalifa family. The country's Sunni rulers have long faced complaints from the island's Shiite majority of discrimination.

A statement published by the outlawed Al-Wefaq opposition group said the prisoners started the hunger strike over what it described as prison officials blocking inmates from worshipping and 23-hour lockdowns daily. The statement also alleged prison officials put inmates in isolation arbitrarily, interfered with family visits and provided inadequate health care to those incarcerated.

"Our demands are not trifles, but very necessary and required for human life, even at the lowest levels known to human history," the prisoners' statement read.

Two prison blocks at the facility started their hunger strike on Monday, while three others started on Tuesday, said Sayed Ahmed Alwadaei, an exiled activist in Britain with the Bahrain Institute for Rights and Democracy. Alwadaei described those in the blocks taking part in the strike as "political prisoners."

The prisoners put the number of those taking part in the strike in the hundreds; The Associated Press could not independently confirm that. Several audio messages, later shared by activists, confirmed the hunger strike.

On Wednesday, imprisoned activist Abdulhadi al-Khawaja joined the hunger strike, his daughter Maryam said. Al-Khawaja is serving a life sentence at the prison after leading protests during the 2011 Arab Spring.

The 62-year-old activist earlier drew attention to his imprisonment with a lengthy hunger strike in 2012, a detention considered "arbitrary" by a United Nations panel. Bahrain convicted him on internationally criticized terrorism charges. "I am worried for my father's life. I don't know that he can survive another hunger strike and it's unfathomable that



he is being pushed, yet again, to resort to this as a means of protest," his daughter said in a statement.

"I don't want my father to be released to us in a coffin," she added.

Responding to questions from the AP, Bahrain's General Directorate of Reform and Rehabilitation said that some inmates at the facility had "returned their meals" on Tuesday. It did not provide a number of those taking part in the hunger strike, but insisted prisons allowed Shiites to commemorate Ashoura and "enjoy their full rights" and health care.

Officials "will continue to monitor the conditions of the inmates who have returned their meals to ensure the quality of the services provided and to address their concerns within the framework of adherence to the law and respect for human rights," the government statement said.

The Jaw Rehabilitation and Reform Center is located toward the southern end of Bahrain, an island off the coast of Saudi Arabia in the Persian Gulf that's about the size of New York City with a population of around 1.5 million people. Concerns over medical care at the prison have been raised before by activists.

The U.S. State Department's recent human rights report on Bahrain noted prisoners' families reported a tuberculosis outbreak at the prison in June 2022. The government denied an outbreak took place, but inaugurated a 24-hour clinic at the prison months afterward, the State Department said.

Bahrain, home to the U.S. Navy's Mid-east-based 5th Fleet, is in the midst of a decadelong crackdown on all dissent following the Arab Spring protests, which saw the island's Shiite majority and others demanding more political freedom.

Since Bahrain put down the protests with the help of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, it has imprisoned Shiite activists, deported others, stripped hundreds of their citizenship and closed its leading independent newspaper.

Meanwhile, Bahrain has recognized Israel diplomatically and hosted Pope Francis last November.

## US Concerned On Hunger Strike Over Bahrain Jail Conditions

The United States said Thursday it has shared concern with key partner Bahrain over prison conditions after inmates announced a hunger strike over their treatment.

Prisoners at the Jau prison, which holds dissidents detained when authorities crushed Shiite-led protests in 2011, have been subjected to 23-hour cell confinement and restrictions on prayer, according to the banned opposition and a rights group.

The Britain-based Bahrain Institute for Rights and Democracy (BIRD) said "hundreds of political prisoners" are taking part.

"We are aware of and concerned on the reports of this hunger strike," State Department spokesman Vedant Patel told reporters.

He said Secretary of State Antony Blinken "expressed concern about some of these reports" during a July 20 meeting with Bahrain's Foreign Minister Abdellatif al-Zayani.

"We urge Bahrain to continue to make progress on criminal justice reforms and ensure human rights standards are upheld," Patel said.

Bahrain, whose Sunni monarchy has tense relations with Shiite cleric-led Iran, is home to the US Navy's Fifth Fleet, which is at the forefront of the Gulf standoff with Tehran.

With support from a military force from neighboring Saudi Arabia, Bahrain crushed the 2011 protests which had demanded a constitutional monarchy and an elected prime minister.

Bahrain faced US criticism at the time, with former president Barack Obama imposing an arms embargo for four years.

But Obama's successor Donald Trump fully embraced Bahrain, which won praise for recognizing Israel.