

BAHRAIN

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

When human rights become a decoy to continue abuse

The history, the experiences of people and the logic show that it is impossible to uphold, respect or protect human rights under dictatorships. This is a known fact that the world powers have chosen to ignore as part of their strategies to secure their interests. Human rights and dictatorships are mutually exclusive and no amount of pressure on dictators will make them respect these rights. One of the fundamental rights is the freedom of speech, affiliation, congregation and protest. No dictator will allow these rights.

Instead of taking a stand to change the situation that facilitate abuses, the modern world orders is based on the undeclared alliances between democracies and autocracies. Those "democracies" are well aware of the nature of their allies, and that their rule is based on compulsion, denial of rights, abuse and immoral approaches to the fundamental human rights. For example the successive US administrations have always known that their allies in the Gulf, most notably the Saudis and khalifis are hereditary dictatorships that sustain their rule through compulsion, subjugation and ruthlessness. This is in addition to the foreign support provided mainly by the Western powers. They have always been aware of the extent of human rights abuses. At no time in those decades did any of the "democratic" powers intervene to stop those abuses. When they are challenged on this issue their diplomats maintain one logic: We find engagement with these regimes the most appropriate way to raise human rights issues. To them, "raising" these issues is an aim in itself. Those allies have mostly been happy with this arrangement. As long as they are not sanctioned by their defenders in the West raising these issues constitutes no problems to them.

As the debate on human rights issues intensified in new millennia, the "democratic" powers adopted a new policy that has empowered those allies. They were "advised" to create oversight bodies whose main objective is to shelter the regimes against any accusation on human rights. So, instead of answering to the charges, the hereditary dictators have delegated this to their new GANGOS. Members of these bodies receive high salaries and are paid to attend international meetings on democracy and human rights. Their duty is to present to

the outside world a rosy picture of the human rights situation. This is one of the most outrageous approaches to the human rights crisis in the Arab world, especially the Gulf. The regimes feel that they have been relieved of the need to deny their criminality; they have new bodies which often shoulder the duty to defend them, news media to be their mouthpiece and unwavering support from their defenders in the West.

In the past decade the human rights situation in countries like Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates has deteriorated sharply with thousands of young men and women languishing behind bars, abused and given harsh prison sentences. When international bodies challenge the regimes on human rights, they find themselves talking to those GANGOS which attempt to whitewash the regimes. These GANGOs attempt to appear professional and have an open access to the regime's resources that enable them to present rosy images of the torturers and abusers. The Western governments are not only aware of this, but some of them have flouted the concepts of human rights and used their expertise to excel in their whitewashing methods. This is one of the most tragic episodes in terms of collective moral stands and principles. This is a serious transgression of the principles of collective commitments and endeavours to create a prosperous world which respects the humanity of mankind, the dignity and integrity of the people and the upholding of the human values. What makes the situation more dire is the exploitation of the international bodies to provide certificates of good behaviour to torturers and abusers.

Last month an official delegation from the UN Human Rights Council was scheduled to visit Bahrain and get first hand information on the human rights situation, having received abundance of evidence of the abuses. The UK appeared to be vindicated about its boasting of its "positive" influence on the khalifis through their intimate relations. For Bahrainis the UK is not justified in its blanket support and defence of a regime that cannot survive without serious human rights abuses. Thus when the regime refused to allow the UN delegation, the UK's propaganda fell silent. It remains to be seen whether the cancella-

tion of the visit was taken by the khalifis alone or with connivance of their supporters. It would have been disastrous for the regime and its defenders (including the UK) if the visit went ahead along the UN's rules and conditions. Its findings would have uncovered an unprecedented criminality involving systematic torture, countless arbitrary detentions, religious persecution, institutionalized discrimination and racism and a deep policy of cover-up. They calculated that the criticism of the cancellation of the visit would be much easier to deal with than the finding of the mission.

Initially, the visit was hailed as a breakthrough in the khalifi relations with the UN agencies and mechanisms. Throughout the crisis, they have attempted to justify their crimes by claiming to uphold the international laws, forge working relations with UN agencies, inviting dignitaries from Western governments to provide them with certificates of good behaviour and sending delegations from their GANGOs to the international bodies to present positive images of a regime whose reputation had sunk to new levels. The ongoing strife within the country has remained a reminder to the world that the Bahrain is in a precarious position in regards to issues of human rights as well as political and civil rights. Their "parliament" has failed to convince the world of the seriousness of the regime in pursuing an open political agenda. The world still considers Bahrain a "NOT FREE" country and, of course, gives legitimacy to the people's struggle to achieve a democratic transformation. The tragic side of this is that the pro-democracy activism will incur further persecution by the regime as its defenders in Washington and London continue their support. This will not deter the Bahrainis but will adversely affect the unholy alliance and tarnish the image of those who consider themselves the backbone of the "free world". They are doing disservice to themselves with this policy and are unlikely to win the moral or political battle that the Bahrainis have been involved in for decades. We will persevere in our legitimate struggle in the hope that, one day not in the distant future, justice will prevail and its champions, wherever they are, will be vindicated and honoured.

Scores arrested in Bahrain, UNHCR addressed on Saudi HR abuses

Arbitrary arrests of native Bahrainis have continued unabated. Two young men from the town of Karranah were detained two days ago: Ahmed Al Hamadi and Mohammed Al Ejaimi were snatched from their homes and taken to the torture chambers to serve a one-year prison sentence imposed by the khalifis. At least six other Bahraini teenagers have been arrested after being ordered to appear for questioning by police. The boys have been identified as Hassan Muhammad Al-Aboud, Mahmoud Al-Aboud, Ali Abdul-Rasul Al-Aboud, Nasrallah Jaafar Dhaif, Ahmed Ali Hubail, and Reda Ali Kadhem. The six appeared before the public prosecutor's office. Some of them were detained and harassed by police in the past.

On 24th September two native Bahrainis from Sanabis were also detained. Qassim Faisal Al Samei' and Reda Khaled Khamis were arrested when they were summoned by the torture officials at the Exhibition Road police station. A young Bahraini boy, Mohammed Hassan Radi has also been given one year jail sentence for taking part in a pro-democracy protest.

Bahrain's opposition Al-Wefaq group documented more than 130 rights violations at the country's Jau Prison in the month of August. Most of the violations involve the denial of medical treatment to detainees during the weeks-long mass hunger strike at the detention facility. Political prisoners, Sayed Reda Sayed Khalil and Ali Essa Abdul have begun hunger strike in protest at preventing them from pursuing their studies.

Anger is widely spreading in the country following the death of at least two Bahraini soldiers who were sent to their death by the

khalifi dictators. The two were part of the khalifi contribution to the Saudi-led aggression on Yemen that had started in 2015 and ended in disaster for the aggressors. Despite the cessation of most of the hostilities after the defeat of the aggressors, the khalifis continued to send people to their death. On Monday a missile fired by the Yemenis near Jazan on the border with Saudi Arabia killed at least two Bahraini soldiers.

On Thursday 21st September, Human rights defender Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja resumes his hunger strike after the prison administration failed to fulfil the promise made to him the day before. On Wednesday, two officers had a meeting with Al-Khawaja and informed him that the transfer of prisoners in Building 14 (where leading opposition activists are held) would not involve restraints (handcuffs), and they would not be transported in the Turkish vehicle. They also assured him that an appointment with a cardiologist would be scheduled soon. As a result, Al-Khawaja stopped his hunger strike and signed a statement stating that he had suspended the strike. However, one of the prisoners from the leading activists Building (B 14) went for an external appointment, and a police officer at the gate informed him that they were unaware of any new decisions or changes. Al-Khawaja then decided to resume his hunger strike.

Since the present 54th session of the Human Rights Council in Geneva started on 11th September several NGOs addressed the session on the human rights in Saudi Arabia and Bahrain. ALQST has made three submissions, ahead of Saudi Arabia's fourth cycle of the Universal Period-

ic Review (UPR). It documented the deteriorating human rights situation in the kingdom since the last UPR in 2018. Its submissions include an individual report, covering broad human rights trends in Saudi Arabia, and two joint reports exploring in more depth thematic areas of concern, on digital rights (with Access Now) and the death penalty (with Reprieve, ESOHR, MENA Rights Group, The Freedom Initiative and ECPM). The review is expected to see some dramas.

Saudi Arabia crown prince Mohammed bin Salman says he does not care about accusations of 'sportswashing'. The Saudi regime has been accused of investing in sport and using high-profile events to improve its international reputation. Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund (PIF) led the takeover of Newcastle United last year and launched LIV Golf. "If sportswashing is going to increase my GDP by 1%, then we'll continue doing sportswashing," Bin Salman said. He told Fox News: "I don't care [about the term]. I have 1% growth in GDP from sport and I am aiming for another 1.5%. "Call it what you want - we are going to get that 1.5%."

Last month Saudi Arabia sentenced a secondary schoolgirl to 18 years in jail and a travel ban for posting tweets in support of political prisoners, the latest example of the crown prince's utter intolerance of independent critical voices. Saudi Specialised Criminal Court handed out the sentence in August to 18-year-old Manal al-Gafiri, who was only 17 at the time of her arrest.

Bahrain Freedom Movement
27th September 2023

Bahraini woman jailed for her opinion, US-Saudi accord condemned

Wide condemnation has been levelled against Bahrain's dictators for banning a trip by a delegation from an international body. A delegation from the office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights was scheduled to visit the country last week to assess prison conditions and offer other technical assistance. After initially agreeing to the visit, the khalifis backtracked at the last minute. Bahraini opposition said Manama's refusal to allow a UN delegation to visit the country is part of the policy to conceal human rights violations and a deepening political crisis. The UN must play a role in stopping rights violations in Bahrain and dissuading the dictators from persecuting critics.

The number of people arrested during two consecutive days last week of police raids in the town of Karzakkan has risen to seven. Among those detained are several minors. The last two names added to the list of arrests are Jassim Muhammad Taher and Muhammad Khalil Ibrahim. A senior political and religious figure went on strike

to protest ill-treatment and lack of medical care. Sheikh Abdul Hadi Al-Mokhowdar was subjected to a tirade of abuse by the khalifi jailers: They kept telling him: You are a criminal.

UN expert on Human Rights Defenders, Mary Lawlor has expressed alarm "at the deteriorating health conditions of 3 human rights defenders in prison: Abduljalil Al-Singace, Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja and Naji Fateel.

The Biden administration has once again, failed the cause of democracy and human rights in Bahrain by signing new agreements with a regime that is notorious for its cruelty and dictatorship. Last week US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken hosted Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa, the khalifi crown prince and prime minister, at the State Department for the signing of a bilateral agreement aimed at bolstering security and defense cooperation, enhancing economic ties and strengthening collaboration on science and technology. "At the heart of the agreement is a shared goal: working

together to build a region that is more secure, more prosperous, and that's more connected to the world economy," Blinken said in a joint announcement. Sarah Leah Whitson, the Middle East Human Rights Experte commented: "Painful to hear Secretary of State celebrating new security commitments to the Bahrain monarchical dictatorship while the country's great democracy activists - like my friend Abdulhadi Alkhawaja - languish in prison. Truly Biden's is a pretend values administration." Front Line Defenders staff have sent "messages of solidarity to our former colleague and friend Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja, unjustly imprisoned for 12 years in Bahrain.

Last week regime's forces arrested a young woman after her return from Iraq where she took part in the annual Arbaceen march in memory of the events of Karbala in 680 AD. The woman, Shaikha al-Majed is a social media content creator had described her emotional feelings as she joined the marchers and re-lived the expe-

Bahraini political prisoners suspend hunger strike, Saudi man executed

Tension is rising in Bahrain's notorious Jau Prison following the end of the hunger strike by hundreds of inmates. They decided to end their action after the khalifis appeared to have ordered the prison officials to cave in to their demands. For five weeks the native Bahraini political prisoners were forced to use hunger as a weapon against the khalifi dictators, demanding the right to proper medical care, longer daily outing from their cells and removal of the glass barriers that have been among the worst inhumane crime committed by the dictators. The barrier has, for the past 12 years separated the detainees from their loved ones including their children, wives, parents and other siblings. The world has stood in solidarity with the native Bahrainis against the khalifi invaders. Their crown prince ordered his torturers to acquiesce to those humble demands for the time being. For his victims this represents a moral victory that will herald the end of his tribal rule. The political prisoners remain vigilant and ready to resume their strike by the end of the month if the regime renege on its promises.

The end of the hunger strike came after many prisoners had fallen, some of whom were rushed to hospital. Among them were Saeed Abdullah Al Aali (from Sitra), Hassan Ali Mahdi (Al Malikiya). Political prisoner Ahmed Mohamed Abdullah has lost 20 kilograms during the month-long hunger strike in Jau Prison.

Meanwhile more native Bahrainis have been detained by the khalifi tribal rulers in the past week. Among them are four young boys from Karzakkan Town who were detained yesterday: Jassim Mohammed Taher Al Jabal, Mohammed Khalil Ibrahim Ali, Hussain Ahmed Hussain Al-Kish and Mohammed Mirza Mohammed Abu Hassan. A 56-years old native citizen

has also been arrested following his remarks against the political naturalisation policy of the khalifi dictators. He was particularly incensed by the institutionalised discrimination against native Bahrainis in the police service.

The human rights activist, Maryam Al Khawaja plans to travel to Bahrain in the coming days, accompanied by some journalists and human rights activists in a quest to get her father released. Agnes Callamard, UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders announced that she would join a Miss Al-Khawaja in her trip. She tweeted: "On behalf of @amnesty10 million supporters globally, I will be joining Maryam Al-Khawaja in traveling to Bahrain this week to call for the release of her father, Abdulhadi al Khawaja, unjustly imprisoned for more than 12 years and for that of all prisoners of conscience". She also urged the Biden administration to ask his guest, the khalifi crown prince, who is visiting Washington to release the political prisoners. The mother of Mohammed Al Daqqaq was summoned by the torturers and threatened with severe consequences if she continued campaigning for the release of her son from jail.

The Wall Street Journal has reported that Bahraini political prisoner, Ahmed Jaffar who has been on hunger strike for few weeks had been subjected to a tirade of physical and psychological torture. It said that a Syrian torturer used offensive language, swearing and sectarian threats to intimidate him. He said to him: We brought you to these cells in order to assault (sexually) your mothers

Following another execution on Friday 8th September, the Saudi authorities have now executed 100 individuals in 2023. Almost half (46) of those were killed by ta'zir (the judge's discretion). The latest execution was reported by the official Saudi News

Agency, without naming the victim. Heba Morayef, Amnesty International's Middle East and North Africa Director, said: "In clear contrast to Saudi Arabia's repeated promises to limit its use of the death penalty, the Saudi authorities have already executed 100 people this year, revealing their chilling disregard for the right to life. "The authorities' relentless killing spree raises serious fears for the lives of young men on death row who were under 18 at the time of the crimes."

This week, Saudi woman activist, Areej Al-Sadhan tweeted the following about how the Saudi torturers dealt with her detained brother: "Is this the hand you tweet with" they said as they broke my brother's hand and smashed his fingers. My brother was in the intensive care unit for days fighting for his life. The regime had placed him under enforced disappearance for years in order to hide the torture."

Six years ago scores of activists, academics and activists and thinkers were detained by the Saudi regime. They include Dr. Ali Hamza al-Omari who currently faces the death penalty for exercising his right to freedom of expression. Also, Islamic scholar Hassan al-Maliki continues to face trial, in which the Public Prosecutor is seeking a death sentence. He was detained in 2017. The charges against him are vague and contravene his right of free expression. They include "lack of commitment to good citizenship".

Saudi courts have 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).

Bahrain Freedom Movement
13th September 2023

rience of the Karbala women as they were paraded by the Umayyad dictator, Yazid for 40 days. She said she shed a lot of tears as she had done during her pilgrimage to Mecca, noting certain differences. Her video clip went viral, causing anger in the khalifi household which hates the Hussaini revolt against the regime that they have been emulating for decades. The public prosecutor's office in Manama jailed the woman for a week accusing her of "insults" directed at a "revered" religious figure. But the Iraqi Parliament's Foreign Relations Committee member Kareem Alewi al-Mohamadawi said the arrest is part of Manama's sectarian persecution of Bahrain's Shiite majority. The woman shared videos of her time in Iraq during Arbaeen, and al-Mohamadawi believes that this is the real reason for her arrest.

In an article in the Foreign Policy, Joey Shea discusses how repeated US failures to hold Saudi to account for a litany of human rights violations has emboldened the Saudi government, allowing it to act with impunity. A

strong, decisive, public action is needed to counter mounting abuses. Under the title: Biden Is Letting Saudi Arabia Get Away With Murder, Again the writer says that Riyadh's forces are killing defenseless Ethiopian migrants at its border, and Washington and its allies don't seem to care.

Over 200 international organisations have signed a letter to the world's governments who are attending the COP28 summit. They urged them to address the UAE's human rights abuses ahead of the event and called for the release prisoners of conscience and human rights defenders. They said "There is no climate justice without human rights!" The signatories include English PEN, MENA Rights Group, and Freedom Forward.

Bahrain Freedom Movement
20th September 2023



Joint NGO letter: The need to address the situation of prisoners in Bahrain at the 54th session of the UNHRC

To the attention of: Permanent Missions of Member States to the United Nations in Geneva, 6 September 2023

Your Excellency,

We, the undersigned organisations, are writing to you urgently with regard to the ongoing hunger strike by over 800 hundred people detained in Bahrain's Jau Prison. We urge you to use the upcoming 54th Session of the United Nations Human Rights Council (HRC) that will occur between 11 September and 13 October 2023, to press the Bahraini authorities to immediately and unconditionally release all those arbitrarily detained on abusive charges, or after grossly unfair trials, including human rights defenders Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja and Dr. Abduljalil Al-Singace. In this regard we call on your government to raise this issue at the upcoming Session of the HRC through a joint intervention with other states under the Item 4 General Debate or, at a minimum, raise this issue and the cases below through an individual statement.

Based on exchanges with individuals who are detained at the prison, as well as some of their family members, the Bahrain Institute for Rights and Democracy, has found that people arbitrarily detained in Jau Prison are forced to endure extremely harsh conditions, including spending 23 hours each day in their cells. The prisoners are calling for an end to solitary confinement, increased time outside of their cells, prayer in congregation at the prison building mosque, face-to-face visitation without glass barriers, access to adequate medical care, and access to education.

We are particularly concerned for the life of Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja, a prominent Bahraini-Danish human rights defender who is currently on a hunger strike to protest his unjust imprisonment and the continued denial of urgent medical care he has been subjected to while detained.

Al-Khawaja, the co-founder of both the Gulf Centre for Human Rights and the Bahrain Center for Human Rights, has been unjustly imprisoned for 12 years. He was arrested in 2011 for his role in peaceful demonstrations during Bahrain's pro-democracy uprising and is currently serving a life sentence in Bahrain. The UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention issued an opinion in 2012 deeming the human rights defender's continued detention to be arbitrary. Al-Khawaja's health has deteriorated significantly during his imprisonment. He has been subjected to severe physical, sexual, and psychological torture.

Prison authorities have repeatedly failed to provide or allow Al-Khawaja access to adequate medical treatment. In February 2023, Al-Khawaja experienced a cardiac arrhythmia. For several months, he was denied access to adequate medical treat-

ment, despite continued cardiac problems and the risk of cardiac arrest.

On August 9, 2023, Al-Khawaja initiated a hunger strike alongside hundreds of other inmates demanding better conditions in Jau Rehabilitation and Reform Center. Two days later, on August 11, he was rushed to the intensive care unit of a Bahraini military hospital due to serious cardiac problems. The attending doctor stressed the imminent danger to Al-Khawaja's life and administered an intravenous injection until his heart rate stabilised.

Al-Khawaja was then returned to prison, where he continued his hunger strike. On August 28, he was transported to a hospital for a short period of time and a doctor performed several tests. Al-Khawaja has not yet been provided with a diagnosis or provided a follow-up appointment. He continues to require urgent and adequate medical care, which prison authorities are yet to provide. According to an independent doctor consulting for the family and who is knowledgeable about Al-Khawaja's case and health, his life is at imminent risk given his deteriorating condition, chronic health issues, and the potential for sudden, fatal cardiac arrest.

We are also deeply concerned about the health of Dr. Abduljalil Al-Singace, a Bahraini academic and award-winning human rights defender serving a life sentence in Bahrain. He has been on a hunger strike without solid food since July 8, 2021, in protest of the confiscation of his handwritten notes by prison authorities. During his hunger strike, he has been sustaining himself on multivitamin liquid supplements, tea with milk and sugar, water, and salts. Dr. Al-Singace has been subject to solitary confinement and denied access to adequate medical treatment, despite the fact he is being held at Kanoo Medical Center, which is a medical facility.

Bahraini authorities, including the Ministry of Interior and its Ombudsman office and the Special Investigations Unit, are responsible for the deteriorating conditions faced by people on hunger strike. The Ministry of Interior oversees Jau Prison, and its Ombudsman recently provided a misleading representation of prison conditions, according to Bahrain Institute for Rights and Democracy.

Serious human rights abuses in Bahrain have not been sufficiently addressed at the HRC since a joint statement delivered by states in 2015. The danger to the lives and wellbeing of Bahraini human rights defenders and others unjustly imprisoned in Bahrain require UN member states to once again take up this issue as a matter of urgency.

We would welcome a meeting with your government to discuss this matter further, and appreciate your time and attention to this matter.

Signatories:

Americans for Democracy & Human Rights in Bahrain (ADHRB), Amnesty International, Bahrain Institute for Rights and Democracy (BIRD), Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (CIHRS), Democracy for the Arab World Now (DAWN), Freedom House, Front Line Defenders, Gulf Centre for Human Rights (GCHR), Human Rights First, Human Rights Foundation, International Service for Human Rights (ISHR), Human Rights Watch (HRW), Project on Middle East Democracy (POMED), Rafto Foundation for Human Rights.

Activist prevented from boarding flight to Bahrain

Maryam Al-Khawaja was barred from boarding a British Airways flight to Bahrain for a visit that she had publicly announced to pressure the Bahraini authorities to release her detained father, Danish-Bahraini human rights defender Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja, Amnesty International, Front Line Defenders, and ActionAid Denmark announced on 15/9. She was being accompanied by a delegation of leading figures from three human rights organizations; Amnesty International's Secretary General Agnès Callamard; Olive Moore and Andrew Anderson, who are current and former directors of Front Line Defenders; and Timothy Whyte, Secretary General of ActionAid Denmark, all of whom were also denied checking in for the flight.

Responding to the news Amnesty International's Secretary General, Agnès Callamard, said: "The decision to prevent Maryam Al-Khawaja and the human rights delegation accompanying her from travelling to Bahrain is a shameless attempt by the Bahraini authorities to stop people from speaking out about human rights violations in the country. The move clearly illustrates the authorities' utter disregard for international human rights standards contrary to what Bahrain's Crown Prince pretended during a trip to Washington DC just yesterday."

Olive Moore, Executive Director of Front Line Defenders said: "Maryam Al-Khawaja placed her own freedom on the line to champion the cause of her ailing father and other human rights defenders, only to be met once again with the Bahraini authorities' contempt for human rights and the rule of law. Their refusal to grant Maryam the basic right to freedom of movement, including the right to return to her own country, is completely unjustifiable."

