

Threats, intimidation, and attacks against human rights defenders and independent journalists in Bahrain.

November 2011

Human rights defenders in Bahrain exposed to an unprecedented campaign of repression in the history of Bahrain after the government attacked the peaceful protests that began in February 14, 2011, where the government and security forces have committed massive human rights violations that included arbitrary arrests, torture, enforced disappearances, Bringing in foreign troops to attack civilians, sexual assaults and death threats, deaths in custody, dismissal from the job, travel ban, smear campaigns, Harassment of family members on an ongoing basis, lengthy incommunicado detention, Provision of civilians before military tribunals and mock trials.

In this report, we will explore some examples of prominent human rights defenders who faced these inhuman violations which indicate clearly the existence of systematic planning at the highest levels of the State to firstly prevent human rights defenders from carrying out their legitimate peaceful work and secondly in preparation for the elimination of Bahrain's human rights movement.

These human rights violations committed by the Bahraini authorities which are well-documented by the international human rights organizations, contradict international laws and human rights treaties and conventions such as the Declaration on human rights defenders adopted by the General Assembly in 1998, on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The government of Bahrain did not fulfill its obligations contained in this Declaration as detailed in paragraph (a) and paragraph (b) listed below:

(A) Rights and protections accorded to human rights defenders¹

Articles 1, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 11, 12 and 13 of the Declaration provide specific protections to human rights defenders, including the rights:

- To seek the protection and realization of human rights at the national and international levels;
- To conduct human rights work individually and in association with others;
- To form associations and non-governmental organizations;
- To meet or assemble peacefully;
- To seek, obtain, receive and hold information relating to human rights;
- To develop and discuss new human rights ideas and principles and to advocate their acceptance;

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Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, see:
<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/SRHRDefenders/Pages/Declaration.aspx>.

- To submit to governmental bodies and agencies and organizations concerned with public affairs criticism and proposals for improving their functioning and to draw attention to any aspect of their work that may impede the realization of human rights;
- To make complaints about official policies and acts relating to human rights and to have such complaints reviewed;
- To offer and provide professionally qualified legal assistance or other advice and assistance in defence of human rights;
- To attend public hearings, proceedings and trials in order to assess their compliance with national law and international human rights obligations;
- To unhindered access to and communication with non-governmental and intergovernmental organizations;
- To benefit from an effective remedy;
- To the lawful exercise of the occupation or profession of human rights defender;
- To effective protection under national law in reacting against or opposing, through peaceful means, acts or omissions attributable to the State that result in violations of human rights;
- To solicit, receive and utilize resources for the purpose of protecting human rights (including the receipt of funds from abroad).

(B) The duties of States²

States have a responsibility to implement and respect all the provisions of the Declaration. However, articles 2, 9, 12, 14 and 15 make particular reference to the role of States and indicate that each State has a responsibility and duty:

- To protect, promote and implement all human rights;
- To ensure that all persons under its jurisdiction are able to enjoy all social, economic, political and other rights and freedoms in practice;
- To adopt such legislative, administrative and other steps as may be necessary to ensure effective implementation of rights and freedoms;
- To provide an effective remedy for persons who claim to have been victims of a human rights violation;
- To conduct prompt and impartial investigations of alleged violations of human rights;
- To take all necessary measures to ensure the protection of everyone against any violence, threats, retaliation, adverse discrimination, pressure or any other arbitrary action as a consequence of his or her legitimate exercise of the rights referred to in the Declaration;
- To promote public understanding of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights;
- To ensure and support the creation and development of independent national institutions for the promotion and protection of human rights, such as ombudsmen or human rights commissions;

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Articles 1, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 11, 12 and 13 of the Declaration, See:
<http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Defenders/Declaration/declaration.pdf>

- To promote and facilitate the teaching of human rights at all levels of formal education and professional training.

Human rights defenders Abdulhadi Al Khawaja:³

On April 9th 2011, during the early morning hours, fifteen masked men stormed into Mr. Alkhawaja's daughter's apartment, breaking down the door with a sledgehammer. The masked men did not produce identification or an arrest warrant. The men beat Mr. Alkhawaja until he lost consciousness and dragged him down the stairs by his neck. He was taken into custody along with his two sons-in-law. Authorities held him *incommunicado* for some weeks, in which time they tortured him physically and mentally.

On May 8, 2011, Mr. Alkhawaja's trial began before the National Safety Court – a military tribunal. He was prosecuted along with a diverse set of twenty other individuals. As the trial progressed, it was clear that the government did not respect Mr. Alkhawaja's internationally-protected rights to a fair trial. Despite the lack of evidence against him, Mr. Alkhawaja was charged and convicted with financing and participating in terrorism to overthrow the government, as well as spying for a foreign country.

Mr. Alkhawaja has been subjected to deplorable treatment during his detention. Because of the beatings he endured from security agents, he suffered four fractures to his face, requiring a four hour surgery to repair his jaw. Security forces are also subjecting Mr. Alkhawaja to other forms of inhumane treatment, such as attempted sexual assault and psychological torture. On June 22, 2011, he was sentenced to life imprisonment.

After his conviction and sentencing, Mr. Alkhawaja told the court that the Bahraini people would continue their opposition to the country's authoritarian regime. For his defiance, Mr. Alkhawaja was beaten by court officers and dragged from the room.

Mr. Abdulhadi Alkhawaja, 50, is a prominent human rights defender and former president of the Bahrain Center for Human Rights. He has been a well known human rights defender for more than twenty years. Until recently, Mr. Alkhawaja worked as a regional coordinator for the international organization Front Line Defenders. Because of his tireless advocacy for peaceful reform in Bahrain, Mr. Alkhawaja has faced a long history of arrests and assaults.

Just before his current detention, Mr. Alkhawaja had publicly criticized the regime's brutal response to the recent anti-government protests in Bahrain. He demanded that charges of torture and corruption be brought against members of the royal family.

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Information has been taken from statements issued by GCHR, BCHR, and other sources.

On October 27, 2011 Abdulhadi's lawyers filed an appeal to the Court to apply for a legal review of the proceedings of the National Safety Court, which sentenced Abdulhadi to life in prison, despite a patently unfair trial and without minimum provisions for his lawyer to defend him.

2. The Doctors and Medics:⁴

On the 29th of September 2011, the National Safety Court, in other words a military court issued the unfair and harsh verdicts against 20 doctors, nurses and paramedics working for the state health sector in Bahrain. The verdicts include 15, 10 and 5 years prison sentences against the 20 health professionals as listed below:

1. Dr. Ali Al-Ekri, 15 years in prison
2. Dr. Nadir Diwani, 15 years in prison
3. Dr. Ahmed Abdul Aziz Omran, 15 years in prison.
4. Dr. Mahmoud Asghar, 15 years in prison
5. Rula Al Saffar, head of Bahrain Nursing Society, 15 years in prison
6. Dr. Abdulkhaleq Al-Oraibi, 15 years in prison
7. Dr. Ghassan Daif, 15 years in prison
8. Bassem Daif, 15 years in prison
9. Sayed Marhoon Al-Wedaie, 15 years in prison
10. Dr. Nada Daif, 15 years in prison
11. Dr. Fatima Salman Haji, 5 years in prison
12. Dheya Jafar Ibrahim, 5 years in prison
13. Dr. Najah Khalil Ibrahim, 5 years in prison
14. Dr. Saeed Samahiji, 10 years in prison
15. Dr. Zahra Mehdi Sammak, 5 years in prison
16. Mohammed Ul-Shehab, 5 years in prison
17. Haassan Mohamed Altoblani, 10 years in prison
18. Ibrahim Abdullah Ibrahim Damastani, 15 years in prison
19. Ali Hassan Alsdda, 15 years in prison, tried in absentia
20. Qassim Mohammed Omran, 15 in prison, tried in absentia

The Bahraini government has presented the military court with a list of ready-made charges against the group such as:

1. The possession of unlicensed weapons and ammunition;

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A statement issued by the GCHR and BCHR.

2. The attempt of forcefully occupying a public building (Salmaniya Hospital);
3. Promotion to bring down and change the regime by illegal means;
4. The confiscation of medical equipment;
5. Spreading false news about the wounded;
6. Inciting hatred against the governing regime.

What the Bahraini government has done on this occasion is something that has never happened in the modern history of man-kind; by targeting the health professionals using the most inhuman ways such as: arbitrary arrest, torture, extracting confessions from them while blindfolded and under torture, and bad conditions in prison.

The ill-treatment that they faced from the very first moment of arrest and the huge pressure created an unlimited amount of psychological and physical pain on all of them, while others are now suffering from chronic diseases. Despite the promise of the King of Bahrain and in contrary to national legislation, the doctors and medics who are civilians have been brought before a military court that lacks the basic principles of justice and does not comply with any of the international standards in order to deliver justice to law-abiding citizens. The 20 doctors, nurses and paramedics who have faced criminal charges, are part of 48 doctors, nurses and paramedics who were arrested in March and April 2011, while the second group includes 28 accused of misdemeanors.

In another human rights violation⁵, the Bahraini authorities has ordered doctors who treated injured protesters during the government crackdown on Pearl Square, to stop their medical work in the private clinics. Most of the doctors were suspended from their work in Salmaniya hospital during April 2011, after they provided help for injured anti-government protesters in February and March 2011.

The Gulf Centre for Human Rights and the Bahrain Centre for Human Rights have received information and supporting documents show that the National Health Regulatory Authority in Bahrain ordered on November 2, 2011 the doctors to stop their work in private clinics, the only remaining source of income for the medics. This latest step of Bahraini authorities is a clear sign that harassment and persecution of the medics continue.

Rula al-Saffar, one of the medics put on trial, told the Guardian that the reasons behind their persecutions “because we are a witness for what happened. We are a witness of the injured people, some of us were there when the hospital was seized... We are accused because we did our job.”

5 Another statement issued by the GCHR and BCHR.

At the height of the protests, security forces stormed the Salmaniya hospital, Bahrain's main and only public hospital, and arrested dozens of doctors and other health workers. According to one of Salmaniya doctors, he estimates that 500 doctors, nurses and paramedics were called to interrogation where they have been stopped from working or dismissed. Many Bahrainis has accused the government of having made systematic efforts to deny medical services to wounded protesters. It is worth mentioning that the international organization "Doctors Without Borders" stopped working in Bahrain in August 2011 after its offices were also raided.

This new order to stop them from exercising their profession completely might be another move to silence them. Dr Nada Dhaif, a surgeon sentenced to 15 years, told Al Jazeera that the number of doctors being jailed is a "unique case" in the "history of any revolution or unrest, and in the history of medicine."

3. Accounts of torture and ill-treatment of doctors and medics at detention centers: ⁶

Bahraini female doctors recount detention 'horror'

"I advise you that we will get you to say whatever we want, either by you saying it willingly, or we will beat you like a donkey and torture you until you say it," one female doctor said, citing her interrogator.

http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5jojcZ8GM-0J_OgTLt5KsY12IiJQ?docId=CNG.ccc3b0204b5da8e7cce5b8854b144bdf.611

Blindfolded, beaten and tortured: grim new testimony reveals fate of Bahrain's persecuted doctors

Details of the assaults, collected by the families of those detained and passed to The Independent, show that at least 40 medical staff were arrested in nine health centres between 10 April and 27 April. Dr Ahmed Jamal, president of the Bahrain Medical Society, was arrested at his clinic on 2 May.

Among 11 female doctors and nurses arrested, eight were released on 4 May but three remain detained, including Rula Jasim al-Saffar, 49, president of the Bahrain Nursing Society who has been held in custody for five weeks.

<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/blindfolded-beaten-and-tortured-grim-new-testimony-reveals-fate-of-bahrains-persecuted-doctors-2281616.html>

'They beat and slapped me and called me whore and dirty Shia'

Bahrain: a doctor's story

One consultant and family physician described in an email how she had been beaten, abused and humiliated and left with a black eye and bruises on her back during a seven-hour detention at the Central Province Police centre. Fearing for the safety of her children, she asked to remain anonymous.

⁶ Bahrain Centre for Human Rights, see:
<http://bahrainrights.hopto.org/en/node/4192>

<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/they-beat-and-slapped-me-and-called-me-whore-and-dirty-shia-2281617.html>

Bahrain medics claim confession under torture

"We were blindfolded for about 10 hours. Only at the time when [we] were videotaped did they take the blindfolds off. When we started to talk, if they didn't like the things that we were saying they stopped us and told us again that we should say this this and this."

One experienced Shia doctor, whose identity we agreed to hide, said she treated all her regular hospital patients by day and demonstrators at the roundabout at night.

"And during the interrogation, whenever I said something which they don't like it, they will slap me again. And I was beaten also by a hose on my hands and my thighs. When I finished, they took me back to the other room, and they came to me later on. In the dark while my -- still I was blindfolded, they gave me the paper of confession to sign it and thumb -- thumbprint without knowing what is there in that paper."

Dr. Farida Al-Dalal spoke in an interview to Aljazeera, of being subjected to ill-treatment and torture, after she was detained for a day, whereas the bruises and the marks of beating were clear on her face.

she was beaten, slapped on the face, hit by a heavy hose on the forearms and legs and kicked in her back. They covered her eyes with other detainees and commanded them to run to slam into the walls. Moreover, they ordered them to dance, and insulted them verbally by calling them "Dirty Shiites", "Whore" and "Idiots who do not deserve wearing the white coat."

A doctor who has been released but does not know if charges will be pressed said she was threatened with rape.

"They said 'We are 14 guys in this room, do you know what we can do to you? It's the emergency law and we're free to do what we want'," she said.

4. Independent journalist Reem Khalifa:⁷

7

A statement issued by the GCHR and BCHR.

Reem Khalifa, a journalist of *Al-Wasat* daily, charged with defamation and physical assault, a trump up charges, which are part of a smear campaign against independent journalists and public personalities in Bahrain who covered government crackdown on protesters in February 2011.

The charges stem from an assault of pro-government supporters on Reem Khalifa, which took place in Ramada Hotel in Manama on July 14, 2011. Reem Khalifa was leaving a press briefing which was interrupted by pro-government supporters. The briefing was organized by the Irish delegation that included a group of Irish doctors, politicians and human rights representatives. The Irish delegation traveled to Bahrain to highlight the plight of Bahraini medics arrested for providing medical treatment to pro-democracy protesters in February 2011.

A group of pro-government medics surrounded Reem Khalifa when she was leaving the briefing in the hotel hall and verbally insulted her. They were also filming her with a mobile phone camera. She repeatedly asked them not to be filmed, according to a you tube video available Online and she is now accused of defamation and physical assault. Reem Khalifa herself filed a case against this group for defamation and physical assault but the public prosecutor dropped the charges, the journalist told Gulf Centre for Human Rights. “Basically they turn the case against me and it was all done directly from the public prosecutor who decided not even to apply the request to bring the hotel CCTV camera,” Khalifa said.

For defamation, Reem Khalifa is facing a maximum penalty of one year imprisonment or fine not exceeding 100 dinars (US \$ 270), according to Article 365 paragraph 1 of the Bahraini Penal Code. Article 339, paragraph 2 of the act states the same penalty for assault. Usually monetary fines are issued in such cases, Mohsin Al-Alawi, Khalifa’s lawyer told Gulf Centre for Human Rights.

Again we see the twisted logic of Bahraini authorities in harassing independent journalists. The reporter is attacked and files a complaint but this of course is not being looked into. She, along with her husband, Mansoor Jamri, the editor-in-chief of *Al-Wasat*, has been subjected to a smear campaign and immense pressure in a clear violation to their civil and human rights.

Reem Khalifa, faced a trial on November 16, 2011 at the Lower Criminal Court in Manama, Where the judge referred the case back to the Supreme Council of the judiciary, and therefore the Council will refer the case to another court .

5. Blogger, owner of the Web Site “BahrainOnline” and human rights defender Ali Abdulemam:⁸

At dawn on 18 March 2011, the armed security forces broke into the house the prominent blogger and owner of the popular Web Site “Bahrainonline” in order to arrest him and when they did not find him, they At dawn on his wife and told her that they are returning to look for him every night. Since then, Ali

Abudlemam has been disappeared and yet the security forces continued to harass and call his wife, members of his family and his relatives.

6. Blogger and human rights defender Mohammed Al-Maskati:⁹

The crackdown on critics or opponents of the government has extended to cyber-activists, most notably bloggers, and even artists. On 1 April 2011, blogger and human rights defender Mr Mohammed Al-Maskati, was arrested and remains in detention. Mohammed Al-Maskati had previously been subjected to threats from a named member of the Bahraini Royal Family via the micro-blogging site twitter, who warned him: “I know you well and I know where you live. If you don't stop what you are doing, I swear by God I will have your family searching for you”.

The same individual later threatened any individual in Bahrain who demonstrated support for Mohammed Al-Maskati, stating: “anyone that's living in Bahrain and is supporting the terrorist emoodz [Al-Maskati], will have his IP address taken and will get arrested!”. The account has since been closed.

7. Human rights defender Jaleela Al-Salman

Teachers have also been targeted during the crackdown. Between 29 and 30 March 2011, members of the Teachers' Association of Bahrain including Salah Al-Bari, Jaleela Al-Salman, Afrah Al-Asfour and Sana Abdul Razak were arrested, and remain in detention. Furthermore, the home of Mr Mahdi Abu-Deeb, head of the Teachers' Association, was raided on 21 March 2011.

On 25 September 2011, Mrs. Jaleela Al Salman was sentenced to 3 years imprisonment by a Military court with charges of inciting hatred towards the regime, calling for a teachers strike and attempting to overthrow the ruling system by force. This comes among other charges alongside her colleague, Mahdi Abu Deeb, President of Bahrain Teachers Association, who was sentenced to 10 years imprisonment.

Mrs. Jaleela was detained since 29 March 2011, only to be released on August 21, 2011 with Head of the Nurses' Society, Rula Al Saffar, after her health deteriorated for going on a hunger strike in protest of her illegitimate detention.

On October 18 2011 at 3:00am¹⁰, Mrs. Jaleela Al Salman, Vice President of Bahrain Teachers Association, was re-arrested following a home raid by security forces in civilian clothing who broke into Mrs. Jaleela's house at 3:00am for the second time this year, despite her father's willingness to open the door after hearing noises. They claimed to be executing court order but lacked an arrest warrant. According to a family member, her father told them that he will call his

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Front Line Defenders, See:

<http://www.frontlinedefenders.org/ar/node/14799>

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Bahrain Centre for Human Rights, See:

<http://www.bahrainrights.org/en/node/4778>

daughter but they insisted on storming into the house and going upstairs where she was in her room sleeping. Her father stood in front of the room to prevent them from entering as they were all men, so they finally agreed to let a female officer in to arrest Mrs. Jaleela. Neither her nor her lawyer had received an official prior notice to her arrest. After an hour of her arrest, she called her family to inform them that she is in Isa Town police station and will later today be transferred to jail. She has been released on the 1st of November 2011. It is believed that Mrs. Jaleela's arrest is due to speaking up about her detention and being subjected to torture. She has been actively speaking about the Bahraini regime's violations against teachers and women overall. Both her and Mahdi Abu Deeb, who is currently held in Jaw prison, are awaiting their appeal on December 11 2011.

It should be mentioned that after her release on August 21 2011, Mrs. Al Salman had to be treated for disc disorder and high blood pressure, as well as for having unstable heartbeats which she had developed during her 149 days in detention when she was on hunger strike.

Seven other board members from the Bahrain Teachers Association who have been detained in the past few months are also awaiting trial:

- Sana Abdulrazag
- Ghusoon Alsayed
- Afrah Alasfoor
- Ali Albana
- Salah Albarry
- Anwar Abdulaziz
- Fakhreyya Meelad

Released detainees had previously described to Human Rights First¹¹ a common pattern of ill-treatment and humiliation at Bahraini prisons, including verbal abuse, long periods of blindfolding (sometimes for several days), being beaten while handcuffed, being forced to sign documents which they were not even permitted to see, and being made to chant pro-government slogans. According to some who served time with Jalila, the 46 year-old mother of three, she has been a source of inspiration and comfort to her fellow detainees. One of these women is Ayat Hassan Mohammad al-Ghermezi, the 20-year-old poet and student who was released last week after being detained for reciting a poem that criticized the government. She too was tortured while in prison, which she described in arecent interview with The Independent newspaper.

In a recently released report, Human Rights First¹² documented how the Bahraini government continues to intimidate, torture, and detain human rights defenders, citing eyewitness accounts and testimonies of injured detainees being tortured on their wounds, sexual abuse, and attacks at medical facilities. The release of some activists like Ayat al-Ghermezi is a relief, but much more needs to be done to rebuild the trust of the Bahraini people. Immediately releasing detained students and teachers and investigating the reports of torture and human rights violations during detention are necessary steps in this regard.

11 Human Rights First, See:

<http://www.humanrightsfirst.org/2011/07/20/female-teacher-forgotten-in-bahraini-prison/>

12 Front Line Defenders, Bahrain: A Tortures Process, July 2011, See:

http://www.humanrightsfirst.org/wp-content/uploads/pdf/Bahrain_A_Tortuous_Process_July_2011.pdf

