

The Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies and the Bahrain Center for Human Rights

Joint written Intervention to the 20th session of the UN Human Rights Council

Item 4- General Debate

Addressing the unremitting silence on human rights crimes committed in the Kingdom of Bahrain

Since the outbreak of mass pro-democracy protests in Kingdom of Bahrain in February 2011, the situation of human rights has witnessed severe deterioration, as violations against protesters continue on an almost daily basis amid deafening silence from the UN Human Rights Council. Despite the establishment of the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry (BICI) in June 2011, which presented its findings and recommendations to the King in November, the government has failed to implement nearly any of the Commission's recommendations. Instead, the government of Bahrain chooses to continue, and in certain incidents escalate, its use of repressive measures against protestors, human rights defenders, and democracy activists. Additionally, the government of Bahrain continues to consistently demonstrate a lack of political will, both domestically and on an international level, to ensure accountability for past and ongoing grave human rights violations, to allow for genuine democratic reform to take place, or to, the very least, ensure non-recurrence.

A recent example that clearly demonstrated the authorities' refusal to acknowledge or address the deteriorating human rights situation in the country was during the Universal Periodic Review of Bahrain on 21 May 2012, when the delegation of the government of Bahrain refused to acknowledge the existing human rights crisis in the country and instead used the assistance of "friendly" countries in the Council to direct appreciation and feeble recommendations that did not address the reality on the ground nor point to practical ways to improve it.

This environment of almost absolute political and legal impunity, which is directly resulting in increased instability in the country, is in large part the result of the stance of the international community which has granted the government of Bahrain almost total impunity for the grave rights violations it has committed since the beginning of pro-democracy protests in the country. Indeed, the double standards and inconsistencies which seem to have overwhelmingly determined the Council's reaction to the mass protests taking place in the Middle East and North Africa region have greatly hindered its credibility and effectiveness.

Accordingly, the Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (CIHRS) and the Bahrain Center for Human Rights (BCHR) continue to call on member states of the United Nations, including member states of the Human Rights Council, to grant immediate attention to the situation of human rights in the Kingdom of Bahrain and ensure that this Council's primary role in promoting and protecting human rights worldwide is realized.

The following are examples of ongoing violations which we were able to document following the release of the BICI report. Most of the violations demonstrate a clear pattern of escalation of repression used against human rights defenders, democracy advocates, and protesters in the country.

§ Since the release of the BICI report, human rights organizations were able to document approximately 45 cases of extrajudicial killings in the context of protests and demonstrations.

Estimates are higher, however due to absence of independent forensic doctors it is difficult to document all cases.

- § Human rights groups continue to document cases of deaths, serious injuries, and suffocation amounting at times to miscarriages and incomplete pregnancies due to exposure to excessive teargas shot directly into people's homes. The majority of the reported deaths were of children and elderly persons.
- § In the past three months more than 40 children under the age of 18 were arrested. Most of the children get arrested from streets following protests and in some incidents from their homes following night house raids. Some of the detained children are presented to trial, at least 3 of which were sentenced to 15 years by a military court. Additionally, Bahrain witnessed renewed arrests of women, as four female protesters were imprisoned for participating in a peaceful protest.
- § Systematic torture for the most part, has been taking place at informal detention centers, mostly near areas where protests take place.
- § The number of injured since January 2012 is estimated to be in the thousands. The militarization of the health care sector continues, forcing most injured protesters to receive treatment for their injuries at home. Recently, at least 4 injured were arrested from hospitals.
- § Many political prisoners continue to be held in prisons despite the clear recommendations of the BICI to release all such prisoners. Lawyers in Bahrain estimate the number of political detainees to be approximately 800. Additionally, people are arrested and released on a daily basis as arbitrary arrests and raids without warrants continue.
- § In the past few months, the crackdown against human rights defenders has escalated dramatically. Leading human rights defender Abdulhadi Alkhwaja continues to serve a life sentence for his involvement in protests in the country, despite his obviously deteriorating health conditions and amid wide international calls to release him.
- § Escalations against human rights defenders also included the imprisonment of prominent defender Nabeel Rajab, president of the Bahrain Center for Human Rights and the Gulf Center for Human Rights, on charges related to his exercise of freedom of expression and assembly. Activist and blogger Zainab Al Khawaja was also detained on what seemed like fabricated charges. Both activists were released very recently.¹ Additional acts of repression against Bahraini activists and defenders include defamation and threat campaigns (most recently the campaign led by a number of government-affiliated journalists against the defenders who traveled to Geneva to attend Bahrain's Universal Periodic Review session, labeling them as traitors and agents of Iran). As for international human rights defenders, they too continue to face restrictions upon entering Bahrain to monitor the human rights situation in the country. According to reports, 10 NGOs have been denied entry into the country.
- § The Bahraini Journalists Association released a report one month ago documenting 140 cases of violations against journalists and bloggers. Additionally, 25 journalists were reportedly prevented entry into Bahrain.

¹ Shortly after the submission of this written intervention to the HRC Secretariats, Nabeel Rajab was rearrested and remains in detention.

- § According to the General Federation of the Bahrain Trade Union, at least 500 of those fired from their jobs in relation to the protests have not yet been reinstated. Those who were reinstated were demoted, given new contracts, and denied compensation. Additionally, the Ministry of Education has recently gone back to cutting hundreds of teachers' salaries and suspending them for 10 days. Violations stretch from receiving harsh prison sentences on politically motivated charges to expulsion from universities.
- § Groups, allegedly backed by the government, attacked businesses belonging to a Shi'a businessman dozens of times in the past year; the most recent attack was one month ago. The businessman was accused of "supporting the protests." No one has been held accountable for the attacks.

CIHRS and BCHR strongly call on all member states of the UN Human Rights Council to take urgent action to address the human rights crises unfolding in Bahrain. In particular:

- **We call on the Human Rights Council to hold an urgent debate on the human rights situation in Bahrain, and to demand that the government of Bahrain immediately begin to implement all recommendation of the BICI, and to call on Bahrain to both accept and begin to implement all recommendations made to it during its Universal Periodic Review.**
- **Moreover, we call on all member states of the Council to collectively voice their concern about the situation in Bahrain through a joint cross-regional statement in order to address and call for an end to the type of grave human rights violations elaborated above.**