

# BAHRAIN

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

## Impediments to positive change in Manama and Riyadh

The pressure is mounting on the supporters of Bahrain's regime to change direction, stop funding and protecting a cruel hereditary dictatorship and support the pro-democracy movement that calls for real fundamental change in this Gulf state. The UK's Conservative government, in particular, is facing embarrassing criticism for spending taxpayers money on propping up a regime that has been widely condemned for its cruel treatment of political prisoners, women activists and children languishing in its torture chambers. Last month a Parliamentary debate that lasted 90 minutes involved at least 11 MPs calling for information on UK's policy on Bahrain, outlining long list of human rights abuses committed by the regime against the native citizens. Apart from three MPs who defended the Alkhalifa dictators, there was unanimous view that the Conservative government must change its policy of appeasement and support of that regime. Those observing the debate were disgusted by the assertions by Alistair Burt, the FCO minister as he went to praise the Alkhalifa GAN-GOs while ignoring the plight of Nabeel Rajab and thousands of prisoners of conscience. Yet the message to his government was clear; descent MPs cannot tolerate the present policy and will work to change it. There is widespread realisation that the taxpayers money is being wasted to protect the Saudi and Alkhalifa regimes despite the conclusive evidence of their support of terrorism and extremism. There is also unease among MPs, journalists and human rights bodies about the lack of transparency with regards to the nature of the relations with these regimes which are engaged in a criminal war on Yemen where war crimes are committed daily.

Meanwhile the situation in the region is causing concern as the balance of power shifts away from the Anglo-American alliance. Mr Trump is gradually becoming a symbol of bigotry, hate and evil. As he steers the way towards conflict, tension and warmongering, new forms of protest are galvanising in Western cities, wary of the fallouts of the culture of populism which is spreading fast. This means the rise of the far right at the expense of traditional Western politics. This phenomenon resonates with the regional developments in the Middle East. The rise of extremism and sectarianism has not been dampened despite undertakings by the Saudis and their allies to

steer clear of the path leading to these evil phenomena. This is detrimental to Western interests that are often overlooked by the Trump administration. For the ideology of the extreme Right in Europe to resonate with Middle Eastern developments the classical European approaches of caution, moderation and evolution appears to be fading away. That is a source of serious worry among the classical Western politicians. The temporal interests of the few in London and other places cannot justify the sacrifice by the people in terms of security, human rights values and human concerns. The moral balance appears to be diminishing at a rapid pace.

The Brexit dilemma cannot be taken to justify the wholesale of morality and human concerns. This has been expressed loud and clear by the Gulf activists who are paying the price of the Western collusion with several monarchical regimes in the Gulf. The events of the past eight years have shown beyond any doubt that peace and security cannot be secured by dictators and despots. While the Arab Spring may have been compromised by the unholy alliance between the Anglo-American alliance with the counter-revolution forces led by Saudi Arabia, future revolts cannot be excluded. The security precautions and crackdowns are not real solutions. They may delay the collapse of the corrupt Arab regimes but cannot totally remove the dangers of more serious revolutions and bloody conflicts. Terrorism is definitely not the answer to the prevailing political crisis, the lack of legitimacy of dictatorial regimes or the removal of ills from our societies. Nor is the notion of "evolution" that is constantly propagated by Western powers, especially the Anglo-American alliance. When faced with the lack of any political progress, officials of those powers would say: We needed 300 years to develop our own democracy. The inference is that people have to wait such a long time for the "evolution" theory to produce results. This perhaps explains the total absence of any calls for real and serious political reforms by the those dictators. Never have been demands that the Saudi or Alkhalifa regimes should embark on reforming their antiquated political systems. Instead those powers have exaggerated the sig-

nificance of the Saudi decision to allow women to drive the cars. This call has been raised for decades, but only now some ground has been granted by the regime. Worse than that is the opening up of prisons to the women activists who have campaigned for women rights. This is true in both Bahrain and Saudi Arabia. Women activists are subjected to most horrific treatment in detention. Last month several Bahraini women were beaten up and abused by a notorious woman torturer because they shouted a religious slogan to mark the martyrdom of Imam Hussain, Prophet Mohammad's grandson.

In the past two decades the Western powers claimed that their mandate was to ensure the protection of human rights by their Saudi and Alkhalifa friends claiming that the political system of government is not within that mandate. Yet even at this level there has been no real attempt to alleviate the suffering of the people of those countries. Bahrain has remained a virtual concentration camp to its own citizens with up to 5000 political prisoners languishing in jail, most of them subjected to torture and inhumane treatment. Among them are women, poets, trade unionists, human rights activists, athletes, teachers and scholars. Neither Washington nor London has called for the release of those people. Even when the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention called for the immediate and unconditional release of the world-renowned human rights activist, Nabeel Rajab, they failed to join the call or exercise any pressure to release him. It is widely known that a phone call from either of the two cities would do that, but the lack of human feelings, compassion or moral decency has proven to be the main obstacle to undertake such a step. This is a severe transgression by those powers on their commitment to create a peaceful, secure and prosperous world in which ordinary men, women and children are allowed to enjoy their basic rights. Unless this mentality changes the world will not become a peaceful place. The present status quo that prevails in the globe only gives a false feeling of peace, the reality is different. There needs to be more rigorous work to achieve peace. Those in power in the West need internal moral transformation before our planet begins its journey to

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## Anger at Saudi repression & crimes; The Times exposes UK role

On 24th September the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) issued a statement titled 'New' Saudi Arabia ushers in even more repressive climate for journalists'. It said: On June 1, authorities arrested Marwan al-Mureisi from the Specialized Medical Center Hospital in Riyadh, while he was at the bedside of his five-year-old son. CPJ is investigating the possible jailing of at least 10 other journalists since Salman took power, but news of detentions sometimes doesn't surface for months. Activists in contact with CPJ often have no knowledge of when authorities detained someone or where they are holding them. The journalists' profile pages and blogs disappear behind "404 not found" messages, leaving only a breadcrumb trail of social media posts that stop the day of a rumored arrest. Even journalists advocating for policies supported by Salman are not safe. Eman al-Nafjan, whose blog Saudi woman covered issues absent from other Saudi media outlets, was detained by the State Security Presidency in mid-May, alongside several other activists who campaigned against the ban on women driving. The next month, authorities ordered the driving ban to be lifted, but the arrests continued. Nouf Abdulaziz, who wrote posts about women's rights, including criticism of the ban on women driving, is also in custody. Saudi Arabia and its allies balked at efforts to renew work by U.N.-backed "eminent experts" investigating human rights violations in Yemen, setting up a possible diplomatic showdown with some Western countries over scrutiny of a 3-1/2-year war that has killed thousands of civilians and created the world's worst humanitarian crisis. The standoff comes just three weeks after the experts issued a scathing report saying the governments of Yemen, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates could be responsible for war

crimes. Mona Sabella, an international advocacy officer at the Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies, said: "The choice is clear for U.N. member states: Support the renewal of independent and international investigations into war crimes in Yemen, or bow to Saudi threats and allow these investigations to be quashed," she wrote in an e-mail. "Nothing would make Saudi Arabia and the UAE happier than to do away with independent investigations into war crimes in Yemen." Before a late Thursday (20th September) deadline at the Human Rights Council, the "Arab Group" led by Tunisia floated a resolution calling for "capacity building and technical assistance" to Yemen's Saudi-backed government, but no extended mandate for the experts. A rival resolution from Belgium, Canada, Ireland, Luxembourg and the Netherlands, among other things, seeks to extend the experts' mandate by a year.

Following a successful Ashura popular programmes in Bahrain in which tens of thousands took part, the regime's prime minister has started the ball rolling for revenge attacks on the majority native Bahrainis. The tribal dictatorship had sought to silence the aggrieved people, threatening the heads of the congregation halls, the orators, lecturers and the general public against any reference to the regime's crimes, any mention of their jailed leaders or any reference to their hundreds of martyrs liquidated by the regime in cold blood. In a statement issued two days ago, the longest serving prime minister in the world was reported to have ordered punishing the native participants in those massive processions. The British-backed Alkhalifa dictators have banned any criticism of their crimes against the native population, their antiquated style of government or their role in attacking and killing Yemeni people. The bleeding hearts of Bahrainis are so agitated that any form of pub-

lic gathering is often used to air their grievances. The regime had sought to hide its crimes by intimidation and torture of critics. Fears are growing for the religious freedom of native Bahrainis.

Yesterday regime's mouthpieces announced that Alkhalifa occupiers had decided to put on trial a group of 169 natives some of whom had participated in anti-regime peaceful protests. According to the reports 111 of these Bahrainis are in jail; the rest are at large. They are falsely accused of forming a cell in the name of "Hezbollah" and were planning to attack government targets. None of Alkhalifa members has ever been attacked in the past 200 years while hundreds of natives have been killed by the regime in the past seven years alone. The regime thrives on accusing the natives of links with outside groups to justify its increasing criminal behaviour towards the native population.

This escalation of repression follows strong criticisms of Alkhalifa by an extensive report and an editorial in The Times on Saturday 22nd September. Both referred to the secret deals between the Conservative government and Alkhalifa that involve spending tax payers money on training regime's officers who are often accused of administering torture on activists including women. Last week a female torturer subjected three women pro-democracy activists to horrific torture when they shouted the name of Prophet Mohammad's grandson, Hussain. She was so incensed when she heard the women wailing that she went berserk; expressing her hatred by merciless attacks on the women and transferring them to solitary confinement. Among them was Hajer Mansoor, mother-in-law of London-based activist, Sayed Ahmad Al Wadaei.

**Bahrain Freedom Movement**

26th September 2018 (info@vob.org, www.vob.org)

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## Calls to support Canada against Saudi threats, Bahraini detainees attacked

There is widespread disenchantment at the failure of Western governments to stand up even to their own allies when they are aggrieved by Saudi Arabia. On 14th September Agence France Press (AFP) broadcast a report on this issue saying: Saudi Arabia's diplomatic brawl with Canada has exposed what Western officials call "new red lines" in their engagement with the oil-rich kingdom, deterring nations from publicly criticising its human rights record. A furious Saudi Arabia last month expelled Canada's ambassador and froze all new trade after Ottawa denounced a crackdown on activists in the Gulf state, in an increasingly combative approach to international censure. Canada has refused to give ground, vowing to always stand up for human rights globally, even as diplomats say high-level negotiations are ongoing between the two countries to resolve differ-

ences. But Canada appears to be standing alone. AFP quoted an anonymous Western official saying: "We are trying to understand: Can we still do critical tweets from foreign ministries in our capitals? What's going to get you PNG'd?" the official added, referring to the expelled Canadian envoy being declared persona non grata by Saudi government.

Last week a Saudi human rights activist who had sought refuge in the UK said that he had been attacked in a London street by men shouting slogans in support of the Saudi regime. Ghanem al-Dosari, who is known for satirical YouTube videos ridiculing the Saudi royals, had been for coffee with a friend near Harrods and posted a Snapchat to his followers that revealed his location. His friend Alan Bender, a Canadian businessman, said the pair accused Mr al-Dosari of being a "slave of Qatar" which is embroiled in a political

crisis with the Saudi government and threatened to "teach him a lesson".

The conditions inside the notorious Alkhalifa prisons are becoming increasingly intolerable. Skin diseases, especially scabies, cancers and other infectious diseases are widespread. In Block 4 of Jau Prison many inmates have developed scabies. In Block 2 at least 14 inmates have been isolated after the spread of the disease. When the prisoners expressed anger and frustration a senior official named as Bader Al Ruwaiei led vicious attacks and torture on them. A mercenary foreign torturer threatened native Bahraini prisoner Ali Sangoor saying: I will behead you. He was also attacked in his cell by another torturer; Amin Abdul Rabb. On 12th September Al Ruwaiei and five other torturers attacked Sayed Mohammad Salman, 27, from Duraz Town after he had been transferred to

## Saudi divisions exposed, Parliament debates Bahrain's HR

As a result of a brave encounter between Bahraini pro-democracy activists and a senior Saudi prince signs of disquiet within the house of Saud have emerged. As two of them, Sayed Ahmed Al Wadaei and Moosa Abd Ali were walking near Belgrave Square ten days ago they spotted the prince with his entourage outside his London residence. They shouted anti-Saudi slogans infuriating Prince Ahmad Bin Abdelaziz, a brother of King Salman. He approached the protesters and criticized the conduct of the Yemen war. When the protesters mentioned the Saudi-led aggression on Yemen, the prince said: "We [the Al-Saud] have nothing to do with what is happening... Certain officials are responsible such as the king and the crown prince. I hope the war in Yemen ends after tomorrow." These statements reverberated in Riyadh leading to more princes fleeing and joining Ahmad bin Abdul Aziz in London. The Bahraini protesters published the recorded encounter. Meanwhile the Labour leader, Jeremy Corbyn, has reiterated his criticism of the arms supplies to Saudi Arabia. Yesterday he tweeted: @Theresa May shamefully continues to allow arms sales to Saudi Arabia, despite war crimes and the deaths of 50,000 people in Yemen so far. In recent months several countries have decided to stop arms supplies to the Saudi aggressors: Canada, Belgium, Norway, Germany and Finland. In her opening statement of the 39th session of the Human Rights Council on 10th September the new UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet said: In Bahrain, a large number of cases of revocation of citizenship has been reported to the Office. The legislation underpinning such actions should be reviewed in line with Bahrain's obligations

under international law. Reports of possible exclusion of Bahraini citizens from the forthcoming elections of the National Assembly are disturbing. All human rights defenders who are currently detained should be released, including Nabeel Rajab. Yesterday a significant debate was held at the UK's Parliament on the human rights in Bahrain. It was held at the request of Andy Slaughter, MP, who represents Hammer-smith. He kicked off the debate with a barrage of facts and figures about the violations of human rights with deep analysis of the situation and an elaborate investigation into the issues of torture, executions, revocation of nationality and arbitrary arrests of men and women. The role of the British Government in propping up the regime was highlighted in some details. Other members of the All Party Group on the Gulf joined in the debate with more embarrassing questions to the government. Three MPs with financial interests from the Alkhalifa government defended the regime and avoided the facts and figures presented by Mr Slaughter and others. The minister admitted that Bahrain is a country of concern despite the support it receives from UK's Conservative government.

In a letter to Bahrain's dictator, a group of 11 of literary icons urged the ruler to ensure Hassan Mushaima receives fair treatment in detention amid reports he had a much-cherished collection of 100 books, dictionaries, and religious texts confiscated while locked up in the notorious Jau prison (Bahrain's Alcatraz). The leading writers are piling pressure on the Alkhalifa tyrant to intervene in the case of a detained political leader who was stripped of the right to read in jail. Bahrain's opposition leader, Hassan Mushaima, 70, was sentenced to life in prison in 2011 on charges of attempting to overthrow the government at the

height of the Arab Spring. The signatories are: Lisa Appignanesi, Margaret Atwood, Amanda Craig, Ariel Dorfman, Daniel Hahn, Ruth Padel, Elif Shafak, Gillian Slovo, Ali Smith, Preti Taneja and Claire Tomalin. The letter comes as his son Ali enters his 42nd-day hunger strike outside Bahrain's embassy in London, where he is calling for his father's access to healthcare, family visits, and his books. He has lost 16 kg since he started on 1st August. Last week he was joined by Zainab Al Khawaja, daughter of Abdul Hadi Al Khawaja, another prominent human rights figure.

On 10th September Alkhalifa regime marked "Back-to-school" week by arresting five under-aged schoolboys in vicious raids on their homes in Duraz. Sayed Ali Sayed Taha, Sayed Muradha Sayed Sadiq, Sayed Ahmad Sayed Moosa, Montadhar Al Rayes and Hussain Mohammad Saleh.

As a result of mismanagement, corruption and misappropriation of public wealth, Bahrain now faces a precarious debt problem, precipitated by low oil prices from 2014 to 2017 and expansionary national budgets that helped control its often-restive population. Bahrain's public debt reached 89 percent of its roughly \$33 billion gross domestic product in 2017, while the government's fiscal deficit reached 13 percent of GDP. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) forecast that public debt could reach 100 percent of GDP in 2019 — an unheard of red line for the wealthy, oil-rich Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). Bahrain is also facing low foreign currency reserves; in June 2018, the country had enough to cover only 1.5 months of imports. In addition, the Bahraini dinar has hit exchange-rate lows this past year that it hasn't seen in 17 years.

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solitary confinement. He is being held at Block 4 of the prison. Another inmate, Abdulla Al Ujaimi, from Karranah Town, was also attacked and seriously injured by past few days, several scholars, lecturers, the notorious torturer. Another torturer is Jaber Saif Eddin who took part in the torture sessions. Human Rights activists have urged UK's Prison Inspection Team which is training these torturers to immediately inspect the cameras in those torture chambers and bring torturers to justice. It is unacceptable that the UK's name is smeared because of the support given to an unworthy criminal regime. Native Bahraini prisoners are taking desperate measures to stop these crimes including hunger strikes. Ali Hajji has now completed four weeks on hunger strike. On 15th September, another inmate, Mohammad Mirza started a second round of hunger strike to protest the denial of medical care that he urgently needed. After his first round of hunger strike he was promised medical care but the torturers have reneged on their promise. As the regime's policy of ethnic and reli-

gious cleansing takes root, the religious rituals of the majority native population have been targeted in vicious ways. In the past few days, several scholars, lecturers, orators and lamentors were summoned by the regime's torturers, threatened with jail and told to accept the ISIS-oriented religious culture that has been adopted by Alkhalifa regime. Among those summoned are: Sayed MohyiEddin Al Mash'al, Sheikh Munir Al Ma'tooq and Sheikh Batic. Three other lecturers were remanded in custody for 15 days for delivering religious lectures related to Imam Hussain, a revered Shia Muslim figure and grandson of Prophet Mohammad. Sayed Majid Al Sahlawi, Sheikh Yassin Al Jamri and Sheikh Hani Al Banna were summoned, interrogated and detained. One of the most popular orators, Mahdi Sahwan has also been summoned

and banned from leading the Hussaini religious processions.

This trend of physical attacks on native Bahraini has led to vilence on women political prisoners. Yesterday, Mrs Hajer Mansoor, Madina Ali and Najah Yousuf were attacked at Isa Town Prison. A team of torturers led by Mariam Al Bardouli waged the aggression on those women who suffer serious ailments. Mrs Hajer Mansoor was seen crying at her cell as her sugar in the blood dropped to dangerous levels. She was immediately rushed to hospital. The women were lamenting the martyrdom of Imam Hussain and the ill-treatment of women by Umayyad dynasty in 680 AD. Madina Ali had addressed the ongoing session of the Human Rights Council in Geneva, read on her behalf by an officer with the Americans for Human Rights and Democracy in Bahrain (ADHRB).

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## Harrassment, intimidation against Bahraini HR activists continue

Major UN Report Warns of “Ongoing Trend of Harassment and Intimidation” Against Human Rights Defenders in Bahrain, including family of BIRD’s Director

12 September 2018 - Today, the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) published its 9th annual report by the UN Secretary-General António Guterres, which details the intimidation and reprisals human rights defenders and activists face worldwide for engaging with the UN, including in Bahrain.

The Secretary-General highlighted the grave concern expressed by several UN actors about the “ongoing trend of harassment and intimidation” against representatives of Bahrain’s civil society who cooperate with the UN. This includes “the sweeping imposition of travel bans on around 20 individuals and the arrest, detention, sexual assault and torture and other forms of ill-treatment of targeted individuals”, as well as “threats of physical violence, public defamation and rape, to discourage them from speaking out again”, because of their past engagement with the Human Rights Council.

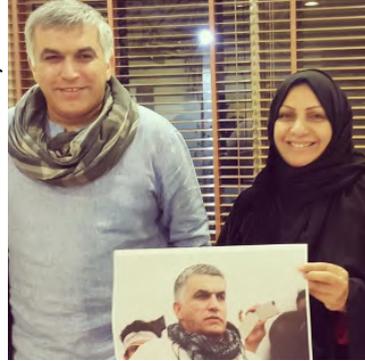
The report expresses particular concern for: family members of Sayed Ahmed Al-Wadaei, Director of the London-based Bahrain Institute for Rights and Democracy (BIRD); human rights defender Ebtisam Al-Asaegh, and human rights defender Nabeel Rajab.

The report illustrates the reprisals against family members of human rights defender Sayed Ahmed Al-Wadaei, which started while he was attending the 34th session of the Human Rights Council in Geneva in March 2017. During that time, his brother-in-law, Sayed Nazar Al-Wadaei, cousin by marriage, Mahmoud Marzooq Mansoor and mother-in-law Hajar Mansoor Hassan “were arrested in Bahrain, subjected to different forms of ill-treatment and torture, and faced terrorism-related charges”, and subsequently sentenced to 3 years imprisonment in October 2017. Concerns are expressed for Sayed Alwadaei’s wife, Duaa, who was “reportedly targeted” by the Bahraini authorities, and was sentenced in absentia to two months prison for “insulting a police officer” in March 2018. Finally, the report highlights the “further reprisals” faced by Sayed’s mother-in-law in Isa Town Prison Centre, after civil society raised her and her family’s case at the Human Rights Council on 2 July 2018 and at the review of Bahrain by the Human Rights Committee from 2 to 4 July 2018.

The report raises concerns about the case of Ebtisam Al-Asaegh, in relation to a travel ban imposed on her and others for their cooperation with the Human Rights Council. The Secretary-General highlights the “physical and psychological torture”, sexual assault and threats by the

National Security Agency following her participation in the Human Rights Council Session in March 2017. Concerns are also raised for her “alleged arbitrary arrest and incommunicado detention in an apparent reprisal for her cooperation with United Nations human rights mechanisms”, previously raised by two special procedures mandate holders. Furthermore, during the 38th session of the HRC in June 2018, it was reported that tweets published by Ebtisam condemning human rights abuses in Bahrain had triggered several threats against her, which were published on social media by two Twitter accounts. Deep concern is also ex-

pressed for Bahrain’s most prominent human rights defender, Nabeel Rajab, arrested in June 2016 for “spreading false news and rumours about the internal situation in a bid to discredit Bahrain” and subjected to a travel ban “since at least January 2015”. These actions and other reprisals against Nabeel are believed to be “connected to his engagement with the Human Rights Council. He was reportedly denied medical treatment by prison administrations while he awaited the results of his appeal trial in ill-health until a 5 June 2018 hearing which decided on an additional five-year sentence.”



### The Times editorial, 22 September 2018 Britain should be open about

The small but strategically positioned island state of Bahrain is blighted by its close proximity to Iran, a country that is trying with its proxy armies to establish itself as a regional leader. Bahrain’s ruling Sunni monarchy fears that many within its majority Shia population are in cahoots with Tehran. The result: a crackdown on dissent and a deep suspicion that its citizens may be plotting to overthrow the al-Khalifa dynasty.

Geography is thus a blessing as Bahrain has grown rich on petroleum refining. It is also a curse. The priority of Bahrain’s rulers should under the circumstances be stability and good governance. And Britain, which first recognised the ruling legitimacy of the al-Khalifa family in 1820, should support both of these aims in its foreign and aid policies. It must do so, however, in a way that is both transparent and encouraging of serious political reform. British aid should have no place in the enabling of torture, because it is morally repugnant and because state-sponsored cruelty is self-defeating.

We report today that Britain is drawing on the Integrated Activity Fund, a pool of money overseen by the Foreign Office, to support Bahrain on security issues. When pressed for details by parliament, officials stonewalled. Freedom of information requests have been turned down on the basis of national security exemptions. There have, however, been credible claims by human rights activists that British money earmarked for “public order” has been used to repress the opposition.

It is time for Britain to give a public and independent accounting of how its aid money is spent in the Gulf states. Not to do so is to risk the accusation that it is complicit in abuse and ready to white-wash wrongdoing in return for securing an important naval base in Bahrain. The base was built with substantial financial assistance from the Bahraini government and will be Britain’s first permanent Middle Eastern military foothold since 1971. Poised close to the choke point of the Strait of Hormuz, it will provide an important staging post for aircraft carriers and destroyers at a time of escalating tensions with Iran.

Since the construction deal was signed in 2014, Bahrain has cracked down on Shia opposition figures with renewed vigour. At the mildest end of its repressive scale, it handed down a six-month jail sentence to an activist for insulting the Bahraini security forces in a tweet. The British government, meanwhile, publicly stated that Bahrain was reforming and “moving in the right direction”.

Britain should not be turning a blind eye to violations of human rights even when working together with a state that shares the West’s security concerns. Instead the country should be urging Bahrain in the kingdom’s best interests to adopt more inclusive policies towards the Shias. Bahrain needs to demonstrate that its wealth is being fairly shared, that its courts are just and unbiased and that its security forces, many of whom have been trained by British police, abide by the laws they