

# BAHRAIN

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

## **Bahrainis reject khalifi-Israeli links, support Palestinian rights**

Bahrain was shocked by the khalifi unilateral decision to go all the way for normalization of relations with Israel and their (theoretical and symbolic) support of the Palestinian cause. It is a known fact that the regime has been dealing with the leaders of the occupation for more than quarter of a century. It was also expected that once the US president's orders to those dictators to abandon the political and economic boycott of Israel, they would not have to the courage to disobey. Since the Arab Spring was crushed a decade ago the new counter revolution alliance (comprising Saudis, Emiratis, khalifis, the military rulers of Egypt and the Israelis) have been working hard to establish real effective presence in the Arab world. The aim has been to prevent a repetition of the Arab Spring, to forge workable and open alliance with Israel and to mobilise public opinion and military resources to target all manifestations of what they call "political Islam". Iran is at the top of these targets. The other Islamic movements such as the Muslim Brotherhood, the Islamic Da'wa Party of Iraq and other dynamic religious tendencies have already been weakened through oppression, diversion and corruption. The liberal and leftist tendencies which had been among the progressive forces to reject the Israeli occupation had been weakened and marginalized.

The unholy alliance of the counter-revolution forces has already been engaged in subversive policies and acts, including the war on Yemen, the subjugation of Sudan and the destabilization of Libya. Prior to that the major Arab countries which had presented a strong challenge to the Israeli occupation and domination in the region had been greatly weakened. Syria, Iraq and Yemen have been wrecked by internal wars of attrition using dirty tactics and means. Sectarianism was also used as a "weapon of mass destruction" to ensure the fragmentation of these countries and the Arab world in general from within. After a decade of intensive plans and subversion, the scene was set for the final act of treachery and betrayal. This time the UAE that has suddenly become the Arab most influential mini-state took the lead in implementing the aims and objectives of the counter-revolution forces. They are now talking of "Arab Nato" as a nucleus

for military alliance to target Iran in any attack planned by the American-Israeli alliance. The apparent actors on the scene, Saudis, Emiratis and khalifis are only pawns in a big political and military fields. Their role is limited to implementation of the goals set by Washington and Tel Aviv.

Although the relations between the khalifis and Israelis go back more than 25 years to the first half of the nineties, the sudden announcement of the normalization process has not been clearly anticipated. In 1994 the then Israeli minister of environment, Yusi Sarid visited Bahrain and was welcomed by the khalifi officials. The visit was kept secret. In January 2000 the khalifi crown prince met with Shimon Peres who was then minister of regional cooperation and described the meeting as a "step on the road to peace". WikiLeaks documents reveal that King Hamed told the US ambassador he had instructed his minister of information to cease using the words "enemy" or "Zionist entity" in referring to Israel. He also admitted that Bahrain was conducting security and intelligence ties with Israel through the Mossad. At a certain August 2005 meeting, the foreign minister conceded that Bahrain had "quiet business" ties with Israel. In 2005 the Israeli minister of the Environment visited Bahrain to attend a UN conference on the climate change. Bahrain's dictator also met Israel's prime minister, Shimon Perez and foreign minister Tsipi Livni in Washington. The secret meetings between the khalifis and Israelis are well-documented.

Against this backdrop the newly-announced rapprochement was a convenient way of pushing the objectives of the counter-revolution agenda through. It is a painful reality, but the region has to live with new realities with more complications, conflicts and even war. The scene is being set for a showdown with Iran. While the Saudis and Emiratis have embarked on developing their nuclear capabilities, they are relying more on the Israeli military power to come to their aid if they decide to wage war on Iran. The Israeli hands could also be at work in the war on Yemen which is becoming increasingly meaningless. The new Middle East is likely to be fundamentally trans-

formed along the American-Israeli vision. But the Yemen experience is not totally convincing to those who may be skeptical about the ability of the counter-revolution forces to regain superior military positions in a region that has remained deeply against accepting the Israeli occupation of Palestine as a fate accompli. But perhaps the most the Gulf dictators hope to achieve is Israeli assistance to counter internal dissention and threats to the ruling clans. Yet the success of this cannot over-estimated. The people are generally resilient. The Palestinians have not succumbed to the Israeli occupation which happened three quarters of a century ago. There is now an apparent alliance of "Resistance Movements" in Palestine and Lebanon that is becoming formidable and pro-active. This could pose a challenge not only to the Israeli occupation but to the Gulf oligarchs.

The people of Bahrain have expressed openly their rejection of the khalifi normalization of relations with Israel. They have taken to the streets, signed petitions and adopted the social media to air their stands. They are aware of the revenge awaiting them from the regime, now supported by Mossad. But they insist on their right to support their Palestinian brothers and sisters who are suffering under occupation. Who, then, will have the upper hand in this competition to achieve meaningful peace in the region? It looks more likely that if the 72 years of Israeli military dominance has not succeeded to break the will of the Palestinians, the Emirati-khalifi normalization with Israel is unlikely to tilt the balance of forces significantly. What is more worrying to those observing the unfolding situation in the Middle East is the mushrooming of opposition to the regimes in Riyadh, Abu Dhabi and Manama. This is becoming a fact of life that could spell more dangers to the counter-revolution alliance than any other outside force. After four decades of "peace" between Egypt and Israel the situation has not changed dramatically. It is thus unlikely that the new "peace brokers" will achieve better results than what Sadat had achieved. He paid the ultimate price for his betrayal of the Arab cause.

## Mayor urged to boycott Saudi G20, khalifis challenged on normalization

Mayors of some of the world's biggest cities are being urged to boycott a G20 urban summit hosted by Saudi Arabia on the 2nd anniversary of the murder of the journalist Jamal Khashoggi. The Urban 20 (U20) is being held as part of the Saudi Arabian chairmanship of this year's G20. Among the mayors slated to attend include, Berlin's Michael Müller, London's Sadiq Khan, New York's Bill de Blasio, Paris's Anne Hidalgo, Rome's Virginia Raggi as well as the mayors of Los Angeles and Madrid. A letter sent to the seven mayors by a global coalition of human rights groups says the Saudi government "as an absolute monarchy without any form of meaningful democratic representation has a long record of silencing the very voices that are necessary for a meaningful global conversation regarding the massive challenges we collectively face. Saudi Arabia's brutal record has only intensified since Mohammed bin Salman became crown prince in 2017." The letter calls on the mayors to withdraw from the U20 event unless Saudi Arabia takes immediate and clear steps to ending its human rights abuses, including by releasing its prisoners of conscience and providing proper accountability for the murder of Khashoggi in October 2018.

One of the women activists in detention is Naseema Al Sadah, a mother of three. This week she tweeted: I am defender Naseema Al Sadah. I was arbitrarily detained in July 2017 in a vicious campaign led by the crown prince against women activists. I spent 8 months in solitary confinement. Before being moved to the normal cells I was subjected to ill-treatment. My only crime was to call for women rights including driving and male guardianship. In its 2020 World Report, Freedom House

has classified Bahrain as "Not Free". Bahrain was given 11/100 in terms of freedom, compared to 12/100 last year. In civil liberties Bahrain scored 10/60. In its overview of the situation the organization said: Bahrain was once viewed as a promising model for political reform and democratic transition, but it has become one of the Middle East's more repressive states. Since violently crushing a popular prodemocracy protest movement in 2011, the monarchy has systematically eliminated a broad range of political rights and civil liberties, dismantled the political opposition, and cracked down harshly on persistent dissent concentrated among the Shiite population. The report highlighted the key developments of 2019 as follows:

- The government continued to revoke citizenship as a political and criminal punishment, leaving people stateless.
- In January, the country's highest court upheld the sentence of life in prison given in 2018 to Ali Salman, leader of the disbanded opposition party Al-Wefaq, for supposedly spying for Qatar during the protests of 2011.
- Three men were executed in July, two of them for alleged terrorism-related offenses, despite concerns raised by UN experts about flawed trials and the use of coerced confessions.
- Political prisoners went on hunger strike in August to protest mistreatment in custody, including the denial of medical care and religious discrimination against Shiites. Inmates at bloc 23 of the notorious Jaw Prison have continued their boycott of the communication arrangements imposed by prison officials. Among their grievances are: the high cost of calling their families, the limitations on those who may be contacted, the bad quality of lines, the reduction

of the call duration to 10 minutes from 15 and the ban on visual calls. They also complain of lack of sleep due to keeping the lights on at night. This is in addition to the lack of medical care.

An open statement rejecting the recent rapprochement between the khalifi tribal regime and Israel has been signed by 143 religious scholars. It rejects normalization of relations in all forms with the occupiers of Palestine. The statement, issued last week insists on the rights of the Palestinians to regain their homeland and considers Jerusalem an occupied city that must be liberated and opened to the followers of all religions

On 20th September Amnesty International issued an Urgent Action calling on people to write to the Bahraini regime to release an underaged political prisoner. Kumail Juma' is currently being held at the Juvenile Reform and Rehabilitation Centre at Dry Dock. He faces over 20 separate prosecutions based on demonstrations against the Bahraini monarchy and appears to have been targeted because his mother Najah Ahmed Yusuf, who was arbitrarily detained from 2017 to 2019, spoke up about her abuse in detention. On 13 September 2020, Kumail was sentenced to five years in prison on one such set of charges, in a trial of 39 defendants – all Shi'a citizens, reflecting discrimination in the criminal justice system by the government. Amnesty International has received credible reports that, in January 2020, Kumail was compelled to sign a prepared "confession" placed in front of him by interrogators after being beaten and forced to stand for prolonged periods of time.

**Bahrain Freedom Movement**  
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## Bahrain rejects khalifi treachery, Saudis urged to release detainees

Bahraini people and opposition groups have rejected a decision by the khalifi rulers to normalise relations with Israel and vowed to resist the regime that has lost its legitimacy. Ayatollah Sheikh Isa Qassim, has issued a statement rejecting this treachery and said: "There is a great divergence between the rulers and the ruled in thought, mind, aims and interests. Governments are experiencing a psychological defeat and want to impose it on the people, and the people have to resist this defeat," Qassim said.

On 13th September a joint statement by 17 of Bahraini political and civil society associations, including the Bahrain Bar Association, stood against the deal: "What results from normalisation will not enjoy popular backing, in line with what generations of Bahrainis have been brought up on in terms of adherence to the Palestinian cause," the statement said. The head of the khalifi highest court ordered judiciary employees not to criticise

government policy or express opinions harming national unity. As the regime becomes more embattled for committing what the people consider a crime, critics are expected to receive the full brunt of the khalifi revenge policy. Yesterday's signing in Washington of a "peace deal" has heralded a new era of more repression and dictatorship. The khalifi regime has already started arresting those taking part in pro-Palestine protests, as a wave of resistance to normalisation with Israel sweeps the country. Such a treaty will not pass without major repression in the coming period.

On 13th September khalifi court "tried" 39 native Bahraini political detainees including 14 minors. The regime has failed to give details of the trial, the victims or their sentences. Among the defendants at this farce trial is Kumail Juma' who was given five years for opposing the khalifi tribal regime. This raised the total sentences he had accumulated to 29 years.

His mother, Najah Yousuf was released this year after spending three years behind bars for calling on the Formula 1 management to stop racing on Bahraini blood. Amnesty has confirmed that at least some of the defendants, already held in jail, were not even allowed to virtually attend to hear the verdict. A regime's court has ordered extending the detention of Shia Muslim clerics Sheikh Ibrahim Al-Ansari and Mulla Qassem Zain Al-Din for another week. This is part of the ongoing religious persecution of the native majority by the khalifi tribal regime.

The persecution of Bahraini prisoners has continued unabated. Dr Abdul Jalil Al Singace, a disabled academic serving life sentence for calling for democratic transformation in the country, has been denied a pair of rubber ferrules for his crutches. He is crippled with Polio from birth and has been repeatedly subjected to harassment including taking away his crutches and forcing him to crawl to toilet. Ali Al

# Post-Ashoora persecution of Bahrainis, Saudi courts jail more activists

The fallouts from the Ashoora commemorations in Bahrain have begun. The khalifi regime has implemented its revenge policy and escalated persecution of the natives. Several scholars and preachers have been summoned by the torture apparatus and threatened with jail and abuse. They include: Sheikh Qassim Zain Al Din, Nasser Ali Nasser, Wissam Al Urayyedh and Sayed Mohammad Al Ghuraifi. They were interrogated about their views on historic matters that had happened in the seventh century. These are related to the Umayyad dynasty that had killed Mohammad's grandson, Hussain and 72 of his relatives and companions. No scholar is allowed to present a different narrative to that embraced by the regime. This is the first time in modern history that such inquisition has been implemented as a policy of the state. The freedom of scholarship is no longer secure as ancient tyrants are being re-marketed by a morally-bankrupt regime. Earlier the heads of at least eight matams (congregation halls) were summoned and threatened with jail if they engaged in religious activities to mark the event. In certain areas, such as Hamad town the processions were banned.

Meanwhile the messages from jail are causing great concerns to their families. Ibrahim Al Samahiji has spent more than five years suffering various ailments without getting proper medical treatment. Now his teeth have begun to break to pieces for no obvious reasons. The regime insists on using medical care as a weapon against natives.

Another form of religious persecution is the denial of religious books to inmates. In the past two weeks prison officials confis-

cated all books in the possession of the prisoners. This is a form of sectarian harassment that serves no security purpose whatsoever. On 4th September Amnesty International condemned the violations of human rights and the religious harassment of prisoners. It said that the khalifi authorities have confiscated religious books and prayers materials of the Shia prisoners. It said: these are considered another form of sectarian harassment implemented by the regime.

A report published by the Spanish newspaper, *Diario 16*, on 7th September said that the human rights bodies have asked the Spanish government to publish the real story behind what it called "the dubious deals" between the former king of Spain, Juan Carlos and Bahrain's king, Hamad bin Isa. The report also said that the government has maintained its silence on the human rights violations in that country. The report enumerated several controversial arms deals, the purchase by khalifi family of the Cordoba football club and the transfer of 1.7 million Euros by Bahrain's king to the Spanish king through his Swiss bank account.

A new wave of arrests is taking place in Saudi Arabia as the regime hastens steps to normalise relations with Israel amid dwindling economic fortunes affecting most citizens. At the same time regime's courts have been issuing harsh jail sentences against innocent people. Al Abbas Hassan Al Maliki, the son of the prominent scholar illegally detained since September 2017, has been given four-years jail sentence. He is accused of tweeting about his father's detention. The Criminal Court has also sentenced Dr Yousef al-Qassim to five years in jail on charges related to his freedom of expression. Al-Qassim has been detained since September 2017.

The Specialised Criminal Court in Riyadh has sentenced six academics and activists to jail sentences ranging between three and seven years. Writer Abdullah al-Maliki has been given seven years for his cultural activities, including defending members of civil rights group. Five years were given to Yousuf Al Qassim and Ibrahim Al Harithi. Ahmed Al Sawyan, Khalid Al Ujaimi and Fahad Al Senaidi were given three years.

Reprieve, which campaigns against capital punishment has called on Saudi Arabia to commute Hussein Abo al-Kheir's death sentence and give him a fair retrial. In 2019, five years after he was arrested and accused of smuggling, Hussein's death sentence was made final because of the confession he signed under torture. Hussein maintains his innocence but his story of injustice is not an isolated one.

Saudi Arabia has denied some prominent detainees contact with their family members and lawyers for months, Yesterday Human Rights Watch said in a letter requesting access to the country and private prison visits with detainees. The situation raises serious concerns for the detainees' safety and well-being. Saudi activists and other sources say that the authorities have also unduly denied numerous imprisoned dissidents and other detainees regular communication with the outside world. "Saudi authorities appear intent on making certain detainees and their loved ones suffer even further by denying them the ability to hear each other's voices and know for certain they are ok," said Michael Page, deputy Middle East and North Africa director at Human Rights Watch. "All prisoners should be allowed unfettered communication with their families and the world out-

Banna, a young political inmate serving 13 years jail sentence has confirmed that several detainees including himself have been transferred to Bloc 16 of Jaw prison which is designated for prisoners with infectious and serious diseases. Prison guards enter this bloc only when they wear protective gears. This is yet another method of slow liquidation of anti-khalifi native Bahrainis. Another inmate, Hussain Al Sa'di has constantly complained of lack of medical care despite his deteriorating health. Five years ago his gallbladder was removed. He suffers enlarged spleen in addition to his sickle-cell blood condition. Native Bahraini inmate Ali AbdulHusain al-Wazeer has been viciously beaten by guards in Jaw prison -- to the extent of breaking bones. The exact site of the torture and the responsible official have been specified by witnesses. Al Wazir was subjected to horrific

torture after he had been transferred to Bloc 15 of Jaw prison two weeks ago. Nothing is known about his condition but his family is extremely worried about him. Prior to this he had engaged in a heated argument with a Yemeni torturer.

Yesterday dozens of Western countries voiced concern at Saudi Arabia's continued detention of women activists and called for those behind the killing of journalist Jamal Khashoggi to be brought to justice. Germany, speaking on behalf of the European Union at the United Nations Human Rights Council, brought up Saudi Arabia's "prolonged detentions of women rights defenders". "We stress the need for full

accountability and transparent prosecution of those involved in the killing of Jamal Khashoggi," said Germany's ambassador, Michael Freiherr von Ungern-Sternberg. Several of the arrested women say they have suffered torture and sexual assault in detention. They include

Loujain al-Hathloul, Nouf Abdelaziz, Samar Badawi, Nassima Al-Sadah, Mohammed Al-Bajadi, and Miyaa Al-Zahrani, the International Service for Human Rights (ISHR) said in a statement. Denmark's ambassador to the United Nations in Geneva, Morten Jespersen, read out a joint statement on behalf of 29 countries - including Australia, Britain and Canada - urging the kingdom to "release all political detainees" and voicing concern at the detention of "at least five women activists".

The trial of prominent Saudi cleric Salman al-Odah is set to resume on October 18, according to his son. Al-Odah has been detained for three years and is facing a possible death sentence on charges that rights groups say violate his right to freedom of expression. On 10th September Saudi security forces stormed a house in Awwamiya Town in Eastern Province using armed vehicles, A young citizen, Muhammad Abu For was detained and taken to unknown destination.

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## Bahraini youth targeted in family reprisal

Kumail Juma Hasan is the son of Najah Ahmed Yusuf, a former prisoner convicted and held for over two years on charges of posting content opposing the government online. On 23 April 2017, Kumail, 14 years old at the time and still in middle school, was summoned with his mother for interrogation on charges of “unlawful assembly”, “hooliganism”, and “production and possession of flammable or explosive articles” (presumably meaning Molotov cocktails). While he was being held in the interrogation centre that day, a court convicted him in a grossly unfair trial in his and his lawyer’s absence of these charges and sentenced him to probation for a year. The family were never informed that he had proceedings on that date, and only learned of the ruling later.

As Najah has described in interviews, during the interrogations with her and her son, Kumail, in April 2017 at the Muharraq office of the Criminal Investigations Directorate (Bahrain’s police interrogation agency), intelligence officers demanded that both mother and son become informants for the government on opposition activities in the Murqoban area of Sitra where the family lived. The officers threatened to take revenge against Kumail, using the criminal charges raised against him as a means of coercion, and told Najah they would kill members of her family, making it appear as an accident, if the two did not accept work as informants. Najah has consistently reported from the time of her arrest that she was subjected to beating and sexual assault by her interrogators. After she refused to become an informant during several days of interrogation and abuse, she was taken into pre-trial custody, prosecuted, and imprisoned based on charges of circulating online opposition content. She has spoken out about her experience to British media (The Independent, the BBC) since her release. Amnesty has written about her case several times.

Later in 2017, after his mother had been imprisoned, Kumail was summoned again under a new set of charges based on alleged participation in a violent demonstration. Given his prior experience of coercion under interrogation and conviction in an unfair trial, he did not respond to the summons. On 26 November 2017, a Bahraini court convicted Kumail in his absence on the new charges, ruling that he had violated the terms of his probation and ordering that he be held for the remainder of the probation term in a youth detention centre. He did not turn himself in to serve this term of detention and therefore became wanted. He managed to take his final exams for middle school in spring 2018, but there-

after went fully into hiding and so could not begin secondary school in the fall 2019 term starting September.

Throughout 2018 and 2019, a steady stream of summons, charges, and prosecutions were raised against Kumail, including six prosecutions based exclusively on charges of “unlawful assembly” and “hooliganism”, and over a dozen more also linked to participation in demonstrations. In total, Bahrain has raised at least 22 separate prosecutions against Kumail arising from his alleged participation in demonstrations. In one prosecution he has 38 co-defendants, including 13 other children – an unreasonably high number of defendants to charge in a single case that makes the task of determining individual criminal responsibility unfeasible and thus violates the right to fair trial. It appears that all of Kumail’s co-defendants, like him and his family, are Shi’a. Kumail’s home area, the island of Sitra, is almost exclusively Shi’a,



and citizens from Sitra have often been viewed with suspicion by Bahrain’s Sunni government. Prison authorities recently confiscated religious articles (spare copies of the Qur’an and rosaries) from Kumail and other Shi’a inmates.

By the end of 2019, cases were being added against Kumail so rapidly that he was sometimes expected to attend separate hearings in separate prosecutions in a single day. Faced with mounting threats to the rest of the family as his father, brother, and cousins were summoned for interrogations on his whereabouts, Kumail ultimately chose to turn himself in after yet another summon, this one to the Nabih Saleh police station for the date of 31 December 2019. After turning himself in, he was transferred later the same day to the Royal Academy of Police, where Amnesty’s sources report he was subjected to beating and stress positions (forced standing). Several days later, he was taken to sign prepared “confession” documents that he had no opportunity to read. Given the proliferation of identical cases against him, the background, and the timing – official pursuit of Kumail became more aggressive as Najah continued to speak out about her own ordeal – it appears that his prosecution and imprisonment have been taken in reprisal against his mother. Kumail was 16 years old at the time of his detention, and thus legally a minor under Article 1 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, to which Bahrain is a party. Bahrain, however, has treated individuals above the age of 15 as adults for purposes of criminal prosecution since 1976, a stance it reaffirmed in its amendment of the Law on Minors in 2014 (Decree of Act No. 17 of 1976 on Minors, Art. 1, and Act No. 15 of 2014 amending this provision). Children under 15 can also be placed in various disciplinary proceedings falling short of criminal prosecution for participating in demonstrations under Bahrain law (Law on Minors, as amended by Decree of Act No. 23 of 2013, Arts. 2.8 and 6).

### Freedom House on Bahrain

Bahrain was once viewed as a promising model for political reform and democratic transition, but it has become one of the Middle East’s more repressive states. Since violently crushing a popular pro-democracy protest movement in 2011, the Sunni-led monarchy has systematically eliminated a broad range of political rights and civil liberties, dismantled the political opposition, and cracked down harshly on persistent dissent concentrated among the Shiite population.

#### Key Developments in 2019

The government continued to revoke citizenship as a political and criminal punishment, even when it left people stateless. However, after a series of reviews ordered by the king under international pressure, nearly two-thirds of the people whose citizenship had been revoked over the past seven years had it restored by late in the year.

In January, the country’s highest court upheld the sentence of life in prison given in 2018 to Ali Salman, leader of the disbanded opposition party Al-Wefaq, for supposedly spying for Qatar during the antigovernment protests of 2011.

Three men were executed in July, two of them for terrorism-related offenses, despite concerns raised by UN experts about flawed trials and the apparent use of coerced confessions.

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