



# INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL SUPPORTING FAIR TRIAL & HUMAN RIGHTS

Registration No. 2795/2012

OFFICIAL LETTER HEAD OF THE ORGANIZATION

## Freedom of expression has become a foreign concept in Bahrain



The International Council Supporting Fair Trial and Human Rights condemns the ongoing oppression, violation and murder of human rights defenders in Bahrain. In spite of lobbying by the organization, and other stakeholders, partners, and the international community, the state of free speech in the country, and especially speech against the government continues to be dire.

Human rights defenders and their families continue to be unjustly detained, mistreated, tortured and severely oppressed in response to speaking out for their rights and the rights of their fellow citizens. Penalties by the Bahraini government against free speech have been unpredictable, unjust, and indefinite detention in jail or prison, physical, psychological, sexual, verbal and emotional abuse, torture, surveillance, restriction of travel, and the death penalty.

The following is a timeline of backlash against free speech in Bahrain. This timeline is not inclusive of all human rights violations in the country:

Human rights defenders and family of London-based Sayed Alwadaei, who is the director of advocacy at the Bahrain Institute for Rights and Democracy (BIRD) Hajar Mansoor Hassan,

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Sayed Nizar Alwadaei and Mahmoud Marzooq mansoor were arrested in **March 2017**, tortured, and forced to sign coerced confessions to criminal acts.<sup>1</sup>

The only independent newspaper, *Al Wasat*, and its employees in Bahrain was suspended on June 4 by the Bahraini government, and the Information Affairs Ministry in particular in **June 2017**.



***Ebtisam al-Sayegh was detained by Bahraini National Security Agency at the Bahraini airport after advocating for her rights, and the rights of her people during the 34<sup>th</sup> Human Rights Council in March 2017, as facilitated by the ICSFT***

The ICSFT had the privilege of hosting human rights defender Ebtisam at the 34th Human Rights Council in **March, 2017**. We were able to help facilitate her advocacy at the Council. However, on her arrival back at the Bahraini airport, she was detained by the Bahraini government. The following is what happened after, as described by someone close to her:

In **July 2017** the ICSFT received the following testimony:

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<sup>1</sup> <http://birdbh.org/2017/10/women-prisoners-declare-hunger-strike-in-protest-of-prison-conditions-and-ill-treatment/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/en/profile/ebtisam-al-saegh>



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“ I am daughter of Bahraini human rights activist Ebtisam al-Sayegh. We are very worried about my mother's fate. Since you are aware of the past torture and harassment by the National Security Agency which emerged from the previous investigation, which was about a month ago in a very difficult situation which is very worrying for us. At 11:45 PM armed civil elements stormed the house with a large number of 5 civilian vehicles and a minibus, including to civil women in Gulf uniforms who claimed to be criminal investigations and they have an arrest warrant for my mother. Whereupon we requested an official paper confirming her arrest. But they refused to do so and did not tell us what the reason or which side would be handed over. Knowing that they have filmed everything that happens in their own cameras. One of them asked the two women's to restricting the hand of my mother, as what I imagine, that he was responsible for them because he was carrying the telegram device, and when they handcuffed her he spoke in the telegram and said, “The accused has been arrested.”

She called at 9pm for about 5 minutes and it was very quick. She asked to bring some personal items and cash amount. She was in a very difficult situation and told us that she was subjected to a continuous successive and very harsh investigation which told her that it will continue tomorrow until she recognition things that she don't have a relationship with it.

Right now she is in the women's detention facility inside a solitary cell to stay in. Also she complained of severe abdominal pain that led to frequent nausea, she did not seek to eat and rest under these circumstances. She also told that she had been take to the citadel hospital for medical tests and that was clear that she was suffering from a low blood rate, for the knowledge that she had an irritable bowel which required her to follow a certain kind of food.

This call did not reassure us about her health, it's very clear though this communication that she has been exposed and is still under intense pressure. This call was interrupted after 21 hours of arrest.

We are strong, don't worry, but we are very worried about her. “

The ICSFT commends her courage, and her commitment to supporting her rights and those of her fellow citizens. Such courage reminds us of the importance for fighting for human rights, and of the best of humanity itself- why we value the rights of each other enough to be willing to put safety and comfort on the line for them.

In **July 2017**, Nabeel Rajab, of the Bahrain Center for Human Rights was unjustly sentenced by Bahrain's Court of Cassation to two years imprisonment for “disseminating false news, statements and rumors ... that would undermine [Bahrain's] prestige and status,” He additionally faces up to 15 years in prison for “insulting public authorities [the Interior

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Ministry],” “insulting a foreign country [Saudi Arabia],” and “spreading false rumors in time of war,”<sup>3</sup> for speaking out about Saudis backing of the war in Yemen.

In **June 2017**, expressing “sympathy” or speaking for the rights of Qatari people, or critiquing in any way the government of Bahrain’s political relationship to that country, Saudi Arabia, the UAE or Egypt was officially declared a crime punishable by imprisonment and other restrictions or penalties.

In **October 2017**, Hajar Mansoor Hassan, Sayed Nizar Alwadaei and Mahmoud Marzooq Mansoor, family of Sayed Alwadaei (see picture below), who were falsely and unjustly incarcerated for their stand for human rights, were convicted following unfair trial and began a hunger strike to garnish an international response. By day three the activists needed medical attention, but continued with the strike, in order to push against ill treatment and restrictions in prison.

The international response was insufficient:

“ 16 NGOs have sent letters to 11 state bodies, including the United Kingdom, United States and the European External Action Service, calling on them to take action ahead of the trial. Their voices are joined by 40 Members of the European Parliament, who have made similar calls to the European Union.

27 MPs have also written to the British Foreign Secretary urging action on the case. The MPs criticise current policy, saying “Despite this attack on his human rights campaigning here in Britain, our government has taken no discernible action to support Mr Alwadaei or his family.” They continued, “We reiterate our call for you to act on this distressing case ahead of the expected sentencing of Mr Alwadaei’s in-laws on 30 October.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Court of Cassation in Manama, Bahrain

<sup>4</sup> <http://birdbh.org/2017/10/women-prisoners-declare-hunger-strike-in-protest-of-prison-conditions-and-ill-treatment/>



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### **Bahraini human rights defenders protest ill treatment in prison, while falsely incarcerated for fighting for their free speech and rights<sup>5</sup>**

In **March 2018**, on the 21st, Duaa Alwadaei the wife of activist Sayed Alwadaei, was sentenced to prison in Bahrain for Sayed's activism, and in particular protesting King Ahmad's visit in 2016 to the UK.

ICSFT condemns the lack of action by the UK to work to protect the rights of Duaa. Sayed's family has been tortured, interrogated, and falsely imprisoned.

He states in a Guardian article:

"Last March, her mother, brother and cousin were all arrested on trumped-up charges of planting a fake bomb. They were tortured and forced into making false confessions without lawyers present. My mother-in-law, Hajer Mansoor, fainted during her interrogation. My brother-in-law, Sayed Nizar, who had just turned 18, was stripped naked, threatened with rape, and told he came from "a dirty family" because of my pro-democracy activism. All of their interrogations related to my human rights work. In October last year they were sentenced to three years imprisonment based on coerced

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<sup>5</sup> [twitter.com/BirdBahrain\\_](https://twitter.com/BirdBahrain_)



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confessions under torture. My brother-in-law was punished further: he received an additional three years on identical charges, and is expecting a verdict on a third charge next week. Meanwhile, my mother-in-law is currently on hunger strike, protesting her humiliating treatment by the prison officers at Isa Town prison.”<sup>6</sup>

ICSFT continues to adamantly decry the lack of response by the UK specifically and the international community to these violations, and in particular states with politically competing and biased interest in Bahrain, including the US and the UK, who choose to turn a blind eye to human rights violations in order to protect their interests while simultaneously claiming to be champions of human rights on the global stage.

The ICSFT has advocated for the freedom of speech for Bahraini human rights defenders, and notably Ebtisam al-Sayegh, Duaa, Alwadaei, Hajar, Sayed Alwadaei, Nizar Alwadaei and Mahmoud Marzooq and all others fighting with courage to create spaces of freedom within their societies..

The ICSFT demands the creation of a system to consistently respond in protection of defenders such as Ibtisam, working against the crackdown and reprisals. ICSFT condemns in the strongest term the crimes carried out by the Bahraini government and calls for the UN and international community to put an end to these violations of the UDHR, among other international and national human rights documents.

ICSFT pushes for an immediate end to all violations and abuses of human rights, full accountability and an end to impunity, as well as a more robust and comprehensive action from the council to increase the visibility of crimes being committed in Bahrain, focused on the issue of citizenship revocation, travel ban, arbitrary detentions and enforced disappearances.

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<sup>6</sup> [https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/mar/22/wife-jail-bahrain-why-wont-uk-act?CMP=share\\_btn\\_tw](https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/mar/22/wife-jail-bahrain-why-wont-uk-act?CMP=share_btn_tw)