



INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL SUPPORTING FAIR TRIAL & HUMAN RIGHTS

Registration No. 2795/2012

OFFICIAL LETTER HEAD OF THE ORGANIZATION

BAHRAIN: 7+ YEARS OF CRUSHING DISSENT



ICSFT continues to be alarmed by the never ending oppression and harassment of human rights defenders in Bahrain. In spite of lobbying by rights groups and the international community, the state of free speech in the country, and especially speech against the government continues to be deadly. The regime has gone to great lengths to clamp down on any sign of dissent, people have lost their lives and hundreds of others sustained injuries or got arrested and harassed with no end in sight.

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 detainment in

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jail or prison, physical, psychological, sexual, verbal and emotional abuse, torture, surveillance, restriction of travel, and the death penalty.

On Sunday, Bahrain courts sentenced dozens of anti-regime protesters as the ruling Al Khalifah regime does not shy away from its heavy clampdown on political dissidents and pro-democracy activists in the tiny Persian Gulf kingdom. 13 defendants were sentenced to 5 years each for allegedly “deliberately setting fire to a police patrol car and holding unlawful gatherings in the northern village of Abu Saiba”. Additionally Bahrain’s low courts have issued death sentences against 32 opposition figures since 2011, of which three have been carried out, seven have been commuted to life imprisonment and two others been appealed.

Prosecutors have detained and charged a former lawmaker Ali Rashed al-Asheeri, for tweets critical of the country’s upcoming parliamentary elections. At this point it is apparent that the election is more ceremonial and to save face than a real embrace of democratic ideals. One of the largest opposition party, al-Wefaq, was dissolved in 2016 and its leader Sheikh Ali Salman, was sentenced to life in prison as part of a crackdown on majority Shiite protesters in the Sunni-ruled country.

These verdicts are pronounced following unfair trials and in many cases than not prisoners have been subjected to torture to extract false admissions and evidences. Several international human rights organizations have issued reports confirming the torture and ill-treatment systemically practiced by the security authorities in Bahrain. To illustrate, Amnesty International issued a report in 2017 titled “No one can protect you”, which contained details of claims and complaints of torture, including the case of woman human rights activist Ibtisam al-Sayegh where she been physical tortured and sexual assaulted during interrogation at National Security Agency headquarters in Muharraq in June 2017.

Thousands of anti-regime protesters have held demonstrations in Bahrain since a popular uprising that began in the country in mid-February 2011 demanding the

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Al Khalifah regime relinquish power and allow a just system representing all Bahrainis to be established.

Amidst this backlash against freedom of expression and opinion, The United States Senate just rejected a measure to block US arms sales to Bahrain, valued at \$300 million in US-made weapons- deal included guided missiles and rocket launch systems, as well as the training of military personnel, and technical and logistical support- which will definitely further emboldens the regime to continue its crackdown against dissent. Following this tragic decision the Bahraini Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated in a press statement “The Kingdom stresses that this important step is in line with the historic and strong relations between Bahrain and the United States of America, characterized by the strategic partnership between the two friendly countries, and contributes to the security of the region”.

The 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. These countries response to the deterioration of human rights in Bahrain has been weak. This, coupled with the lack of criticism by fellow member states in UN forums, has emboldened Bahrain further.

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

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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 UN to increase the visibility of crimes being committed in Bahrain, focused on the issue of citizenship revocation, travel ban, arbitrary detentions and enforced disappearances.

Of note, ICSFT urges the Bahraini regime to reverse all death sentences and sign relevant conventions that promote and protect human rights including the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.