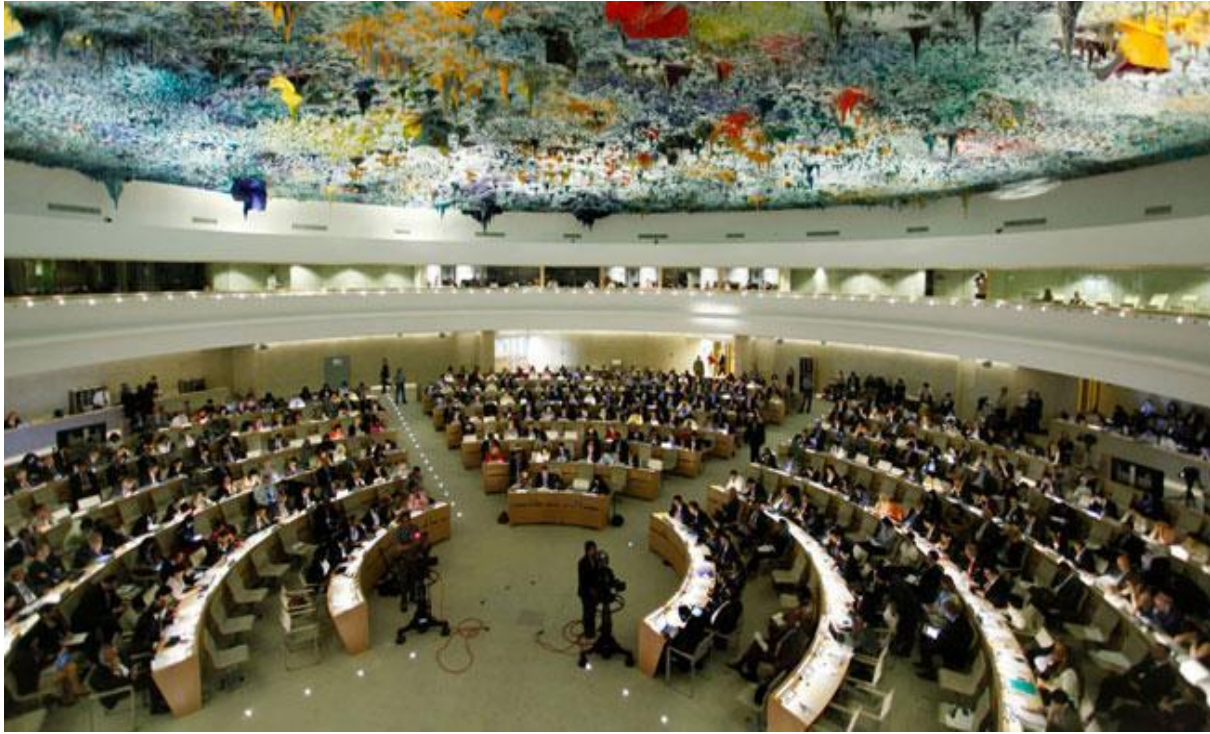




INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL SUPPORTING  
FAIR TRIAL & HUMAN RIGHTS  
Registration No. 2795/2012  
OFFICIAL LETTER HEAD OF THE ORGANIZATION

**ICSFT STRONGLY DEPLORES BAHRAIN'S ELECTION TO THE UN  
HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL**



The UN Human Rights Council yet again, elected a country with poor human rights records, Bahrain, whose election to the most important human rights body ran uncontested. This lack of standards continues to undermine the credibility, effectiveness, and sustainability of the organization. For too long the human rights council has been used as a hiding platform for human rights abusers and a cesspool of political bias and double standards.

Around a third of seats on the 47-member council, based in Geneva, were open for slots lasting from 2019-2022. For the first time since the council was created in 2006, each voting region agreed in advance on 18 candidates to run for the 18



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seats - removing any competition. By putting forward serious rights violators for the candidacy and presenting only as many candidates as seats available, the member states are co-signing the vile human rights violations in countries like Bahrain.

Bahrain is known for its systemic human rights violations, and consistent non-cooperation with UN human rights mechanisms, including special procedures mandate holders and treaty bodies. Bahrain authorities have increased crackdown against dissents amongst, but not limited to,

- Arbitrary killings by security forces
- Torture of detainees
- Harsh and potentially life-threatening prison conditions
- Arbitrary arrest
- Holding political prisoners
- Unlawful interference with privacy
- Restrictions on freedom of expression
- Restrictions on freedom of the press
- Restrictions on freedom of association
- Restrictions on freedom of movement, including arbitrary revocation of citizenship

Since 2011 the government has engaged in draconian policies to suppress and ultimately eradicate the opposition. The government has dissolved all opposition



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political parties, silenced independent media, jailed human rights defenders and political leaders, and criminalized forms of expression and association.

To illustrate, Al-Wefaq's secretary general, Ali Salman, has been arbitrarily detained since 2014<sup>1</sup> and is now serving a nine-year sentence for incitement. Al-Wefaq itself was dissolved by court order and its assets confiscated for allegedly inciting terrorism.

The Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, in its recent decision also declared Nabeel Rajab's, head of the Bahrain Center for Human Rights, was sentenced to jail time in July 2017 for criticizing the government. He was given an additional five years in February 2018 for other anti-government statements, imprisonment unlawful, warned that Bahrain could be engaged in crimes against humanity due to its widespread use of arbitrary arrests.

In April 2017, King Hamad ratified a constitutional amendment allowing military courts to try civilians accused of threatening the security of the state. The UN Human Rights Committee expressly criticized this amendment in its recent review of Bahrain.<sup>2</sup> In addition, in April 2018, seven UN experts deplored a military

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<sup>1</sup> according to the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention

<sup>2</sup> Concluding observations of the Human Rights Comm. On the initial report of Bahrain, 12-13, UN Doc. CCPR/C/BHR/CO/1 (July 26, 2018)



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court's imposition of the death penalty on four men charged with terrorism, following coerced confessions and a trial lacking due process.<sup>3</sup>

Women's rights activist Ebtisam al-Sayegh was detained and interrogated multiple times in 2017, including upon her return from attending a UN Human Rights Council session. According to al-Sayegh, during one of her interrogations, she was beaten, stripped and sexually assaulted, and her family was threatened. Other prisoners of conscience also reported torture and ill-treatment. In recent concluding observations, both the Human Rights Committee and the Committee Against Torture criticized Bahrain for frequent use of torture and ill-treatment in prisons, and as a means of eliciting confessions<sup>4</sup>.

Bahrain is regularly criticized by the UN for reprisal against HRDs and civil society for engaging with the UN human rights mechanisms.

Former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Hussein also criticized Bahrain for its ongoing repression against dissents and criminalization of exercising the right to expression and association, and called on the government to launch an independent investigation and stop reprisal against Human Right Defenders and oppositions.

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<sup>3</sup> Bahrain: UN rights experts condemn military court convictions, cite torture allegations, Office of the High Commissioner (April 30, 2018)

<sup>4</sup> Concluding observations of the Human Rights Comm. On the initial report of Bahrain, supra note 14, at 36-37; Concluding observations on the second and third periodic reports of Bahrain, 8-9, UN Doc. CAT/C/BHR/CO/2-3 (May 29, 2017).



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In his recent report the Secretary-General highlighted the serious violations of government reprisals and singled out Bahrain's retaliation against activists as an "ongoing trend of major harassment and intimidation against human rights defenders ...Including the imposition of travel bans on selected individuals; the arrest, detention, and ill-treatment of targeted individuals; and one particular case involving sexual assault and torture as a form of reprisal."

It is in spite of these well documented human rights violations Bahrain is elected unopposed to judge on and dictate human rights. This calls for a critical look into the criteria based on which such an election was made and how it reflects the true human rights record of the elected country- as of now it is apparent the election system is broken and not an indicator for positive human rights practices in elected countries.

ICSFT strongly deplores the unopposed election of Bahrain to one of the highest human rights organ, the UN HRC, despite its atrocious human rights record and repression against HRDs, political oppositions, and civil societies that call for political and human rights reform in the country. We are exceptionally disheartened by member states loud support of these rights abuses through their inaction and silence.



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ICSFT urges the international community to double down efficient and innovative steps to hold Bahrain accountable for its crimes, and urge the regime to respect its international human rights obligations.

Bahrain is categorically unfit to hold a membership seat the Human Rights Council.

The new members will take their seats at the council in January 2019.