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## **Bahrain security forces storm village of top Shia cleric**

***Raid on Diraz comes two days after Trump pledges improved relations with Gulf state***

By Simeon Kerr

Financial Times (23.05.2017) - <http://on.ft.com/2qz24jK> - Security forces stormed the village of Bahrain's top Shia cleric on Tuesday, vowing to "enforce security and general order" as violence escalates in the Gulf state. Activists said police backed by armoured vehicles used shotguns and tear gas in the raid on Diraz, home to Sheikh Isa Qassim. The ministry of interior on Wednesday said five people who were "attacking officers" died and 19 police were severely injured in the operation. Bahrain, which hosts a US naval base, has been plagued by sectarian tensions, with accusations that the Sunni-dominated government discriminates against the Shia majority. Shia protests have intensified since the 2011 Arab uprisings, and the government has responded by stifling dissent, banning the main Shia opposition group, al-Wefaq, and revoking the nationality of Mr Qassim. A court last week gave the cleric a suspended one-year jail sentence for financing extremism in the Gulf archipelago. Police have surrounded Diraz, which is on the outskirts of Manama, the capital, for months after people began a sit-in around Mr Qassim's house. When his nationality was revoked last year, he was accused of "serving foreign interests" and promoting "sectarianism and violence". The cleric denied both charges made against him. The accusations were interpreted as a reference to Iran, which Bahrain accuses of stoking Shia militancy in the Gulf state. Shia activists deny the

claims and blame the government, which is supported by Saudi Arabia and other Sunni Gulf states, for fuelling sectarianism.

The police operation was launched two days after Donald Trump met Bahrain's King Hamad and pledged to improve relations with the kingdom as the US president rallies a Sunni coalition against Iran. His stance contrasts with that of the Obama administration, which blocked arms sales to Bahrain because of human rights concerns. It also angered Gulf states by signing the nuclear deal with Tehran in 2015. "Our countries have a wonderful relationship together, but there has been a little strain, but there won't be strain with this administration," Mr Trump told King Hamad on his visit Saudi Arabia, where he met Arab leaders. Human rights activists said Mr Trump's rhetoric against Iran and his strong display of support for Gulf states may have emboldened Bahrain. "The Bahraini security forces' operation in Diraz, which appears to have already claimed at least one life, looks like a strategic show of strength aimed at ending a peaceful and legitimate protest," said Nicholas McGeehan of Human Rights Watch. "The timing of this operation — two days after King Hamad's convivial meeting with President Trump — can hardly be a coincidence." The Bahraini government said the operation on Diraz was targeting "a meeting ground of fugitives". It claims that it is challenging a radical minority that is using increasingly violent tactics against the police. An interior ministry statement said 50 fugitives were arrested in the raid on Diraz, some of whom had escaped from prison. It said "several terrorists" used the cleric's home to try to avoid arrest. Last month, the kingdom reintroduced military trials for civilians who "threaten state security", reversing one of the reforms it introduced under international pressure in the wake of the 2011 uprising.

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## **DROI Chair shocked by recent executions in Kuwait and Bahrain**

European Parliament News (26.01.2017) - <http://bit.ly/2jTAp9P> - The newly elected Chair of the European Parliament's Subcommittee on Human Rights (DROI), Pier Antonio Panzeri (S&D, IT), made the following statement on behalf of the Subcommittee:

"Yesterday Kuwait hanged seven prisoners - four men and three women-, the first executions carried out since 2013. Those executed included a Bangladeshi, a Filipina, an Ethiopian, two Kuwaitis and two Egyptians, according to a statement carried on the state-run KUNA news agency.

These executions follow the very recent executions in Bahrain on 15 January of Abbas al-Samea, Sami Mushaima, and Ali Abdulshaheed Yousef al-Singace, the first to be carried out in Bahrain since 2010 - and, according to Amnesty International, after an unfair trial and despite claims from the men that they were tortured in custody.

In Bahrain two other Bahrainis, Mohamed Ramadan and Husain Ali Moosa, appear to be at imminent risk of execution.

The EU considers capital punishment to be a cruel and inhuman punishment which fails to act as a deterrent to criminal behaviour. The abolition of the death penalty worldwide represents one of the main objectives of the EU's human rights policy.

On behalf of the Subcommittee, I deeply deplore the decisions by both Kuwait and Bahrain to resume executions despite the worldwide trend towards abolition. Instead of stepping up executions the Kuwaiti and Bahraini authorities should put in place an immediate moratorium on executions and work towards the definitive abolition of the death penalty.”

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## **Identity politics and the suppression of Shia in Bahrain**

***By Mark Barwick, HRWF Policy Advisor, presented to the International Conference on Persecution of Shia in Bahrain, 22-23 April 2016 in Brussels***

HRWF (26.04.2016) - It wasn't all that long ago that Bahrain was praised for its government's broad-based movement toward reform and liberalisation, an opening up to greater freedoms and respect for human rights. King Hamad was decorated many times over for his reform-mindedness, for improving living standards and for admitting more Shiites into government positions.

Some knew quite well that this was more window-dressing than real change. Yet friends of the house of Al-Khalifa continued to heap praise, even while watching the kingdom's descent into chaos and a worrying disregard for the basic rights of its citizens.

Some observers from the outside looking in have suggested that Bahrain was just following the familiar pattern of Islamic identity politics, that the ancient rivalry between Sunni and Shia was threatening the stability of an otherwise comparatively moderate Gulf State. However, although identity politics have not played a significant role in the current state of affairs in Bahrain, this may increasingly become a self-fulfilling prophecy if the situation does not change in the months and years ahead.

What may have been some movement toward reform has become more and more a paranoia directed against Iranian influence in the region. And it is this struggle against Iranian influence – real or imagined – that has been harshly projected upon Bahraini Shiites and that carries the potential for radicalising an already disaffected youth. In this way the government has played out a politics of fear that is already coming back to haunt it.

What this means for the forces of change within Bahrain is there must be a clear and sustained commitment to refuse the trap of identity politics and press for the creation of an inclusive and democratic Bahrain – not a Shiite Bahrain but a Bahrain where every citizen counts, where all are equally protected under the rule of law and where all citizens can participate in making decisions that affect their lives and future.

There is little doubt that Iran will try to exploit Bahrain's political chaos in these volatile times. And of course, there are Iranian agents seeking to influence the course of events in Bahrain. But the struggle for democratic reform and for human dignity in Bahrain cannot be reduced to a Shia-Sunni conflict or another example of identity politics in the Gulf.

### ***National unity and Sectarian identities***

There was an interesting study done on the conduct of military personnel during operations in Syria, Yemen and Bahrain in the course of recent political unrest. It is interesting to note the way that the dynamics of sectarian identity played out in each of the three countries.

For example, in Bahrain, when the regime deployed its security and military forces to contain and dismantle protest sites in 2011, the military hierarchy had a strong interest in favouring the status quo. Compared to Iraq and Yemen, there was much more support for the stability of the regime, even in the face of clear injustices being played out in the course of events. Military commanders wanted to protect their positions. Reform would have cost them dearly: it was the power of social and economic hierarchy that contributed to the government's ability to suppress the revolt at that time.

In both Syria and Yemen the military command fragmented and the countries slipped into civil war – but not Bahrain. Bahrain's military remained more or less intact, and it was not just out of self-interest. There was also an element of national identity that comes to light in the case of Bahrain. The struggle in 2011 was not so much about Shiite liberation as it was about ending authoritarian rule in Bahrain. And the continuing struggle is not so much about Sunni control over a majority Shia population as it is about forging a democratic future for Bahrain.

One might say that in the end these will arrive at the same result. However, the distinction is important: the government can more easily make a case for suppressing Shia militancy than it can for suppressing basic freedoms. This is precisely how the regime has tried to posture itself: as acting to maintain peace in the face of internal and external threats to its national security. Instead of addressing the real issue of authoritarian rule, the Hamad regime has focused on troublemakers, "terrorists" and "spies" for Iran that seek to undermine and destroy the government of Bahrain. Of course, this kind of counter-insurgency strategy easily aligns itself with US policy of containment in the region.

In this way the more that vital questions about human rights and democratic governance go unresolved, the more that the country risks greater numbers of its Shia youth becoming radicalised. As stated above, while identity politics have not played a significant role in the current situation, we could expect that it will in the future if these core issues are not adequately addressed. Bulldozing mosques and Shia buildings does nothing to achieve political reform and progress on human rights. The imprisonment of peaceful opposition leaders does nothing to instil respect for the Hamad regime. And talk of national unity and respect for constitutional institutions ring hollow when hate speech from pro-government sources undermine any sense of unity and social harmony.

### ***The rule of law and the future of Bahrain***

The result has been the deepening of sectarian tensions and therefore playing into the regime's strategy of suppressing Shia identity and cultural life in Bahrain in the name of national security. And the cycle of violence continues, raising the risk of radicalising the opposition and weakening reformist voices within government and civil society. These are the moderate voices that will be needed to help craft a sustainable political solution to the current impasse.

The struggle in Bahrain is not about Shia identity; it is a struggle for the Bahraini people and for justice and democratic rule. The sectarian composition of Bahrain is an imposition of the ruling regime and should not have real relevance to the need for overall change to the country's balance of power in order to move forward as a nation. That means building a national identity that is based on citizens' rights, the rule of law and democratic institutions and not religious affiliation. This is the only path toward a vibrant democratic society where all individuals' rights and freedoms are protected with equal vigour. This is the challenge for Bahrain today and indeed for the Gulf region.

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## **US resumes aid to military in Bahrain**

BBC News (29.06.2015) - Security assistance has been withheld since 2011, when the Gulf state put down mass Shia-led protests.

But US State Department spokesman John Kirby said that Bahrain had made progress on human rights, including the release of political prisoners.

Bahrain is home to the US Navy's Fifth fleet and has flown airstrike missions over Syria as part of the US-led coalition against Islamic State (IS).

### **'Meaningful reform'**

"We believe it is important to recognise that the government of Bahrain has made some meaningful progress on human rights reforms and reconciliation," State Department spokesman John Kirby said in a statement.

He added that this did not mean that the US thought the human rights situation in Bahrain was adequate.

"Following the lift of these holds, we will continue to press Bahrain on our human rights concerns," Mr Kirby said.

He gave no details about what the security assistance would entail.

The move was quickly criticised by rights groups. Sarah Margon, the Washington director of Human Rights Watch, said that the decision to lift restrictions was taking place without any "real or meaningful political reform" in Bahrain.

She said in a statement that "Bahrain's jails are bursting at the seams with political detainees and the recent prison sentence for political opposition leader, al-Wefaq secretary general Sheikh Ali Salman, means that a political accommodation remains as far away as ever."

Earlier in June, Sheikh Salman was jailed for four years for inciting hatred, promoting disobedience and "insulting" public institutions.

Shia-dominated demonstrations against Bahrain's Sunni monarchy have occurred sporadically since 2011.

Dozens died when the government moved to quash protests four years ago.

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## **Bahrain strips Shiite activists of citizenship amid unrest**

CNN (07.11.2012) - Bahrain has revoked the citizenship of 31 Shiite activists, the latest clampdown on the opposition amid continued unrest in the Persian Gulf kingdom.

The state-run Bahrain TV announced the move Tuesday evening, citing an Interior Ministry statement. The television anchor read out the names of the 31 activists, which included Jawad Fairouz, a former member of parliament for the Shiite opposition group Al-Wefaq, and his brother, Jalal.

Among the other prominent opposition figures who were stripped of their citizenship were Said al-Shihabi, the head of the Freeman of Bahrain movement, and Ali Hassan Mushaima, the son of the leader of Al-Haq group.

Also on the list were three Shiite clerics: Hussein Mirza, Khaled Mansour Sanad and Alawi Sharaf.

The Interior Ministry statement Tuesday said the country's Citizenship Act "allows the kingdom the right to revoke the citizenship of anyone who is charged with being a threat to the state's security," Bahrain TV reported. Those who object to the decision have the right to challenge it in court, it added.

Two prominent Bahraini groups, the Bahrain Youth Society for Human Rights and Bahrain Center for Human Rights, decried the move.

The groups said they had "grave concern over the systematic targeting of prominent political activists, former members of parliament, clerics and others. The Bahraini authorities did not provide substantial evidence as to why these individuals' citizenships have been revoked."

Rights group Amnesty International similarly condemned the move.

"The authorities have provided the vaguest of reasons for the deprivation of nationality, which appears to have been taken on the basis of the victims' political views," said Philip Luther, Amnesty International's director for the Middle East and North Africa.

"Most worryingly, the authorities are making some in the group stateless. This, as well as any arbitrary deprivation of nationality, is prohibited under international law," he said.

"We urgently call on the Bahraini authorities to rescind this frightening and chilling decision."

Bahraini authorities imposed a ban late last month on public protests, saying it was necessary to rein in violence. But Amnesty International said the move breached people's right to free speech.

Violent clashes have broken out between security forces and opposition protesters on numerous occasions since protests began in the island nation in February 2011, spurred by uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt.

Bahrain's ruling Khalifa family is Sunni Muslim, but about two-thirds of the country's people are Shiite.

The country is strategically important for the United States in the region and it is home to the U.S. Navy's 5th Fleet.

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## **Ministry of Foreign Affairs files protest with Iranian Charge d'Affaires over misrepresentation in media**

Information Affairs Authority (01.09.2012) - The Ministry of Foreign Affairs Undersecretary for Regional and GCC Affairs, Ambassador Hamad Ahmed Al Amer, today filed an official protest memorandum with the Iranian Charge d'Affaires Mahdi Islami

related to the misrepresentation made by Iranian State Television in the speech delivered by the Egyptian President Dr. Mohammed Morsi, during the opening session of the sixteenth Non-Aligned Movement summit. Translators working for Iran's State media substituted Bahrain's name for remarks the Egyptian President made about Syria.

In his speech on August 30th Morsi stated, "The revolution in Egypt is the cornerstone for the Arab Spring, which started days after Tunisia and then it was followed by Libya and Yemen and now the revolution in Syria against its oppressive regime." That statement was translated into Farsi as "the revolution in Bahrain against its oppressive regime" and broadcast through Iranian Television and Radio.

Morsi went on to urge the fractured opposition of Syria to come together; but once again, Iranian translators switched "Bahrain" for "Syria".

This is considered a breach of ethics and customary rules regulating media, as well as an act of fraud; and is the latest example of Iranian media's intervention in the internal affairs of the Kingdom of Bahrain.

The Ministry in its official memorandum requested the Iranian government apologize for this act, and take the necessary action to correct the breach and insure that actions like this one don't happen again. It noted that such conduct is bad for the relations existing between the two countries, as well as trying to disturb the fraternal relations between the Kingdom of Bahrain and Egypt.

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## **Peacemakers 2012 summer camp promotes conflict resolution and reconciliation**

IAA Press (22.08.2012) - The National Commission for Childhood has launched a summer camp for youth between the ages of 9 and 12 under the auspices of the Ministry of Social Development. Over 100 children, drawn from different neighborhoods around the country participated in the program aimed at counteracting sectarianism and social polarization among children and youth.

The program director (and Vice-President of the National Commission for Childhood), Dr. Jinan Alumran, put together a team of 33 counselors to operate the summer camp program that focuses on fostering tolerance and preventing exploitation by extremist groups and ideology. Counselors found that children are particularly sensitive to the events of the last year, often suffering from sleeping and eating disorders, as well as acting out aggressively and suffering from chronic nightmares.

The Peace Camp is part of a larger national strategy for children set forth by the National Commission for Children. The commission also hopes to introduce non-violence training in the public schools and widen training in conflict resolution over the coming academic year.

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## **Resolution of the European Parliament on human rights in Bahrain**

The European Parliament (15.03.2012) / HRWF (19.03.2012) – [www.hrwf.net](http://www.hrwf.net)

The European Parliament,

- having regard to its previous resolutions of 7 July 2011 on the situation in Syria, Yemen and Bahrain in the context of the situation in the Arab world and North Africa(1) , and of 27 October 2011 on Bahrain(2) ,
  - having regard to its resolution of 24 March 2011 on European Union relations with the Gulf Cooperation Council(3) ,
  - having regard to the statements by its President of 12 April 2011 on the death of two Bahraini civil activists and of 28 April 2011 condemning the death sentences passed on four Bahrainis for participating in peaceful pro-democracy protests,
  - having regard to the Hearing of 3 October 2011 on Bahrain in the European Parliament Subcommittee on Human Rights,
  - having regard to the statements by the Vice-President of the Commission/High Representative (VP/HR) on Bahrain of 2011 and in particular that of 24 November 2011 on the publication of the report of the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry, the Statement by the spokesperson of High Representative Catherine Ashton on the anniversary of the unrest in Bahrain on 13 February 2012, and the statements of 12 October 2011 by the VP/HR on the situation in Egypt, Syria, Yemen and Bahrain at the European Parliament,
  - having regard to the Council conclusions on Bahrain of 21 March, 12 April and 23 May 2011,
  - having regard to the statements of 23 June and 30 September 2011 by the UN Secretary-General on the lengthy sentences imposed on 21 Bahraini political activists, human rights defenders and opposition leaders, including in some cases life imprisonment, and the Statement by the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General on Bahrain on 15 February 2012,
  - having regard to the statement of 29 September 2011 on Bahrain by the 66th UN General Assembly,
  - having regard to the press statement issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Bahrain on 5 October 2011 and the statement issued by the Bahrain Ministry of Health on the Sentencing of Doctors, Nurses and Medics on 30 September 2011,
  - having regard to the statement of 23 October 2011 by the Bahraini Public Prosecutor regarding the retrial of doctors previously prosecuted in military trials,
  - having regard to the report of the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry of 23 November 2011,
  - having regard to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights of 1966, the United Nations Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, and the Arab Charter on Human Rights, to all of which Bahrain is a party,
  - having regard to Article 19(d) of Bahrain's Constitution,
  - having regard to the EU Guidelines on Human Rights Defenders of 2004, as updated in 2008,
  - having regard to the Human Rights Watch report of 28 February 2012,
  - having to the 1949 Geneva Convention,
  - having regard to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948,
  - having regard to Rule 122(5) of its Rules of Procedure,
- A. whereas 14 February 2012 marked the first anniversary of the peaceful popular movement calling for respect for fundamental human rights and democratic reforms; whereas government authorities made arrests and prevented peaceful protestors from gathering; whereas government forces violently cracked down on protestors; whereas tear gas, stun grenades and birdshot were used in residential areas and the police reportedly broke into several houses;
- B. whereas protests continue to be violently repressed; whereas persecution, detention and torture of human rights defenders, lawyer, teachers, health

workers and bloggers who took part in the peaceful pro-democracy protests continue; whereas according to human rights organisations over 100 citizens have been arbitrarily detained over the last two months;

- C. whereas the banking and tourism-based economy, already weakened by the world financial crisis, is struggling to revive;
- D. whereas on 29 January 2012, approximately 250 political prisoners began a widespread national hunger strike because 14 prominent political and human rights activists had been arbitrarily detained since March 2011;
- E. whereas since early 2012 the Bahraini authorities have denied entry to the country to international human rights organisations and journalists, and restricted visits by them, which is a serious impediment to their ability to carry out their work;
- F. whereas the BICI (Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry) report, commissioned by the King last June and published in November 2011, found that 35 people had died in last year's unrest, including five security personnel and five detainees tortured to death while in custody; whereas the BICI's report concluded that excessive force had been used against peaceful protesters, political activists, human rights defenders and journalists, that torture was widespread and that many people were on trial or had been sentenced to prison terms for exercising their rights to freedom of expression and assembly; whereas in its report, the BICI expressed the view that the trials did not comply with international standards of due process, or with Bahrain's own Criminal Code;
- G. whereas the Bahraini King has accepted the findings of the report and appointed a 19-person National Commission to oversee the implementation process; whereas the National Commission is scheduled to release its conclusions on 20 March 2012 covering the management of the police, judiciary, education and media departments; whereas King Hamad Ben Issa Al Khalifa of Bahrain has publicly pledged to undertake reforms to achieve national reconciliation;
- H. whereas following the recommendations of the BICI, Bahrain has completed the setting-up of a special investigatory unit within the public prosecution department dedicated to determining the responsibilities of those who have committed unlawful or negligent acts resulting in deaths, torture and mistreatment of civilians during the last year;
- I. whereas the implementation of the BICI recommendations remains slow; whereas a process of national dialogue for reconciliation has been initiated;
- J. whereas according to several NGO reports, unfair trials before military and civilian courts are a central element of the repression of the pro-democracy protest movement in Bahrain; whereas one of the recommendations by the BICI was that all citizens tried by military courts should have their cases reviewed by ordinary courts, but this still has not been implemented in all cases;
- K. whereas the Bahraini authorities have repeatedly stated their commitment to undertake human rights reforms and to cooperate with international human rights organisations;
- L. whereas there have been several calls for the Government of Bahrain to extend a standing invitation to the Special Procedures of the UN Human Rights Council;

- M. whereas the UN Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, Juan Mendez, was supposed to visit Bahrain from 8 to 17 March 2012 but has been officially asked by the Bahraini authorities to delay his trip until after July 2012;
- N. whereas more than 4 000 people were reportedly dismissed from their jobs or expelled from university for having participated in the protests; whereas according to Bahraini trade unions more than 1 000 of them have still not been reinstated and whereas dozens of university students are still waiting to be allowed to resume their studies; whereas many of those reinstated have been pressured to sign statements in which they pledge to refrain from any trade union related activities and consent to being appointed to posts other than their original ones;
- O. whereas, on the basis of the events of the past year, Reporters Without Borders has identified Bahrain as an 'enemy of the internet';
1. Welcomes BICI's recommendations and urges the Bahraini Government to take all the necessary steps to fully and swiftly implement its recommendations in order to address the most important issues, end impunity, restore social consensus, improve human rights protection in line with international human rights standards and implement major reforms;
  2. Expresses its solidarity with the victims of repression in Bahrain and their families;
  3. Condemns the ongoing violation of human rights in Bahrain and urges the Bahraini authorities and security forces to stop the excessive use of violence, including the excessive use of tear gas, repression, acts of torture, unlawful detention and prosecution of peaceful protestors, and to exercise the utmost restraint when attempting to control protests; urges the authorities to act in strict accordance with their legislation and international obligations; stresses the right to a fair trial which Bahrain has signed up to;
  4. Reiterates its call for the immediate and unconditional release of all peaceful demonstrators, political activists, human rights defenders, doctors and paramedics, bloggers and journalists, in particular Abdulhadi al-Khawaja, President of the Bahrain Centre for Human Rights, and Mahdi Abu Dheeb, President of the Bahrain Teachers' Association, who have been detained or convicted for exercising their rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly or complying with their professional obligations;
  5. Stresses that demonstrators have expressed their legitimate democratic aspirations and urges the Bahraini authorities to achieve the process of reconciliation within an inclusive and constructive dialogue, which is essential for the democratic stability of Bahrain's diverse society, in which the rights of each citizen should be equally guaranteed both by the letter of the law and in practice;
  6. Urges the Bahraini authorities to conduct thorough, impartial and independent investigations into the human rights violations by the police and security forces and as a result of the military presence in Bahrain during and after the pro-democracy protests against peaceful protestors and citizens, to ensure accountability and prevent impunity for those responsible, regardless of position or rank, and to adopt measures to deter future human rights violations;
  7. Calls on the Bahraini Government to withdraw all charges and drop all convictions handed down since February 2011 in the National Safety Courts or civilian courts

based on the exercise of the rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly, and all convictions based solely on confessions;

8. Calls on the Bahraini authorities to ensure that the authorities provide all criminal defendants with prompt and full access to legal counsel, as prescribed by Bahraini and international law, including in connection with interrogations and in preparation for trials, to investigate credible allegations of torture and ill-treatment during interrogation and to hold accountable any officials who fail to meet the requirements of ensuring a fair trial;
9. Calls on the VP/HR to hold the Bahraini Government to its promises to respect human rights, implement the necessary reforms, start independent investigations into human rights violations and ensure that those responsible are held to account, as well as to urge the Bahraini Government to drop all charges against doctors and medical staff and to release all those detained for participating in the peaceful pro-democracy protests;
10. Calls on the Bahraini authorities to restore and respect human rights and fundamental freedoms, including freedom of expression, both online and offline, freedom of assembly, freedom of religion, women's rights and gender equality, to fight discrimination and to immediately end all restrictions on access to information and communication technologies; calls on the Bahraini authorities to lift all entry restrictions for foreign journalists and international human rights organisations and to allow monitoring of the announced independent investigations into human rights violations and the implementation of the announced reforms;
11. Welcomes the setting-up of a Ministry for Human Rights and Social Development in Bahrain, and calls on that ministry to act in accordance with international human rights standards and obligations;
12. Urges the national authorities as well as the European enterprises involved to take the necessary measures to ensure the immediate reinstatement of the remaining individuals who were dismissed from their jobs;
13. Welcomes the suspension by the United States of the export of weapons, arms and other tools which can be used for the violent repression of citizens and for human rights violations and similarly calls on Member States to ensure that they abide by the European Council Common Position defining common rules governing the control of exports of military technology and equipment;
14. Reiterates its strong opposition to the use of the death penalty and urges the Bahraini authorities to declare an immediate moratorium;
15. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the Vice-President of the Commission/High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, the governments and parliaments of the Member States and the Government and Parliament of the Kingdom of Bahrain.

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## **Bahrain protesters boost pressures on king with huge march; sporadic clashes**

AP/Washington Post (09.03.2012) / HRWF (16.03.2012) – [www.hrwf.net](http://www.hrwf.net) - Tens of thousands of anti-government protesters flooded a major highway in Bahrain on Friday in

one of the largest opposition rallies in months against the Gulf nation's rulers. Security forces fired tear gas at smaller groups attempting to reach a heavily guarded square that was once the hub of the uprising.

The march was called as a show of resolve by a Shiite-led rebellion against Bahrain's Sunni monarchy more than a year after the Arab Spring-inspired protests began. The main procession was mostly peaceful, but breakaway groups were driven back by tear gas as they headed toward Pearl Square, which was the center of the uprising for weeks last year until it was stormed by security forces.

The demonstration is also a reply to Bahrain's Sunni leadership, which has portrayed the uprising as losing steam ahead of next month's lucrative Formula One Grand Prix car race. It was canceled last year because of violence on the tiny island.

The march stretched for miles. Some opposition leaders estimated the crowd at nearly 100,000, which would make it one of the largest protest gatherings since the street rallies erupted in February 2011.

Bahrain's majority Shiites seek to end the Sunni dynasty's control of all main posts and policies in the strategic Gulf nation, which is home to the U.S. Navy's 5th Fleet. Shiites make up about 70 percent of Bahrain's 525,000 citizens, but they complain of widespread discrimination and say they are blocked from high-level political and security positions.

Bahrain's rulers have offered some concessions, including granting more decision-making powers to parliament, but reject demands that include giving up the right to appoint holders of top positions, such as prime minister.

At least 45 people have been killed in the unrest, and hundreds have been arrested.

"Down, down Hamad," protesters chanted in a reference to Bahrain's King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa. Others carried signs in English and French denouncing the monarchy in an appeal to international media and websites.

Organizers said the march would end at a site called Freedom Square outside Bahrain's capital, Manama. Police reinforcements were sent to keep protesters from any attempts to shift toward Pearl Square, which is now ringed by razor wire and under 24-hour watch.

The unrest in Bahrain has put the U.S. in a difficult position. Washington has called for dialogue to try to ease the tensions, but it fears that pressing too hard on Bahrain's leaders might jeopardize its important military relationships. The 5th Fleet is one of the Pentagon's main Gulf forces on Iran's doorstep.

Bahrain and its Gulf Arab allies have accused Shiite Iran of maintaining links to the Bahrain opposition groups, but no direct evidence has been produced.

In Baghdad, about 2,000 Iraqi Shiites called for Bahrain's king to be banned from the Arab League summit set for the Iraqi capital later this month.

Iraq's support for Bahrain's Shiites has angered Sunni Gulf states. That was one of the reasons the League canceled plans to hold its summit in Baghdad last year.

The protesters, followers of hard-line cleric Muqtada al-Sadr, also complained that Syrian President Bashar Assad was not invited. His Alawite religion is an offshoot of Shiite Islam.

Syria has been suspended from the Arab League because of Assad's brutal crackdown on protesters.

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## **Hundreds railroaded in unjust trials**

### ***Politically motivated prosecutions flagrantly disregard rights***

HRW (28.02.2012) / HRWF (05.03.2012) – [www.hrwf.net](http://www.hrwf.net) - Bahrain has routinely convicted hundreds of opposition activists and others of politically motivated charges in unfair trials, Human Rights Watch said in a report released today. The government should void the convictions in trials before Bahrain's military and civilian courts that fell far short of international fair trial standards, Human Rights Watch said.

The 94-page report, report of the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry, a body of five international jurists and human rights experts set up by King Hamad. Human Rights Watch has documented the persistent practice of torture and ill-treatment by Bahraini security officers over the past several years.

Those whose convictions should be voided and who should be released from prison include protest leaders such as Ibrahim Sharif, Abdul Hadi al-Khawaja, Hassan Mushaima, and Abdul Wahab Hussein, Human Rights Watch said.

In one case a nurse was convicted of "incit[ing] ... hatred and contempt for the governing regime" and of "destroy[ing] moveable property ... in furtherance of a terrorist purpose" because she allegedly stepped on a photo of the prime minister.

Human Rights Watch called on the United States, the United Kingdom, France, and other countries to suspend all military and security-related sales and assistance to Bahrain until the government addresses the serious rights violations resulting from the suppression of peaceful demonstrations and the unfair trials.

On March 15, 2011, Hamad issued a decree proclaiming a three-month "State of National Safety," akin to a state of emergency, which gave wide-ranging authority to Field Marshal Khalifa bin Ahmad Al Khalifa, commander of the Bahrain Defense Force, to issue sweeping regulations governing public order and enforce those measures as well as existing laws. The decree also established special military courts, called National Safety Courts, to prosecute crimes that "brought about the State of National Safety" and "def[ied] the procedures" of the decree.

Between their establishment on April 4 and their culmination in early October, these courts tried hundreds of Bahrainis caught up in the "national safety" dragnet. The armed forces commander appointed the presiding judge, always a military officer, and two civilian judges to hear these trials, and trials were held at the military complex in al-Riffa.

As of October 7, all prosecutions and appeals of people charged in connection with the political unrest of the previous months were moved to civilian criminal courts.

Proceedings in several security-related trials before civilian criminal courts prior to February 2011 raised essentially the same issues, Human Rights Watch found: politically motivated prosecutions triggered by things people wrote and said rather than actual criminal offenses, denial of basic due process rights such as right to counsel, and allegations of torture and ill-treatment during interrogation.

"King Hamad should examine the special military courts he set up by decree before claiming there are no political prisoners in Bahrain," Stork said. "In case after case, people were convicted for their political beliefs, for the slogans they chanted, and for

joining large peaceful rallies that the Crown Prince had publicly proclaimed were protected by Bahrain's constitution."

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## **Freedom House delegation denied entry to Bahrain**

Freedom House (24.01.2012) - Bahrain has recently denied entry to Brian Dooley of Human Rights First and Richard Sollom of Physicians for Human Rights (PHR), and now Courtney Radsch and two other colleagues from Freedom House.

The Bahraini Government's refusal to allow a Freedom House delegation to visit the country calls into serious question its stated intent to engage in meaningful reform.

On January 19, just days before a delegation of Freedom House staff were scheduled to travel to Manama, it received a letter from the Bahraini government indicating that it would not be allowed entry into the country at this time. In the letter, Bahrain's Ambassador to the U.S. wrote that a trip should be delayed until the end of February. The staff had already obtained visas and were in possession of a letter from the U.S. Embassy confirming a scheduled meeting when they received word of the cancellation.

"By denying or delaying entry to independent international NGOs, the Government of Bahrain is signaling they have something to hide. If they are truly committed to the reforms they have embraced publicly, they will allow civil society and the media unfettered access to the country," said Robert Herman, vice president of regional programs at Freedom House, and head of the delegation that was to visit Bahrain.

Freedom House had planned to send three staff members to Bahrain to help implement a women's empowerment program funded by the US Government. Freedom House has been working on the ground in Bahrain since 2004, and has been engaged in this regional women's empowerment program since 2010. The Bahraini Government has repeatedly denied entry to staff from international human rights organizations, including Human Rights First and Physicians for Human Rights, even after the release of the Bahraini Independent Commission of Inquiry (BICI) report.

"This development, when combined with the continued repression of non-violent protests and the arrest of human rights activists-all of which has continued to take place after the release of the BICI report-paints a bleak picture of the supposed 'reform efforts' in Bahrain," said Charles Dunne, director for Middle East and North Africa programs at Freedom House. "Many in the country are concerned that the government will intensify the crackdown as the one-year anniversary of the February 14th uprising approaches," he continued.

Bahraini citizens have been broadly engaged in protests since February 2011, to call for a more representative government and to denounce the pervading ethnic inequities in the majority Shiite country run by the Sunni Al-Khalifa royal family.

Bahrain is ranked Not Free in Freedom in the World 2012, Freedom House's survey of political rights and civil liberties, and Not Free in Freedom of the Press 2011.

Freedom House is an independent watchdog organization that supports democratic change, monitors the status of freedom around the world, and advocates for democracy and human rights.

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## **Molotov cocktail against a Shia journalist's home**

By Willy Fautré

HRWF (28.10.2011) - Journalist Sameera Rajab's home in West Riffa was attacked with firebombs shortly after 10 pm on 25 October, just 24 h after she participated in a televised debate in Al Ittijah Al Mo'akis (Opposing Views) show on Al Jazeera's Arabic TV channel in which she accused Iran of interference in Bahrain's internal affairs.

Interviewed by Human Rights Without Frontiers in Bahrain, Ms Rajab, a columnist for the newspaper Akhbar Al Khaleej, said "I was lucky because on that evening it was my daughter who first saw that there was fire and she started screaming. So, we could stop the starting fire on time." Ms Rajab described the incident as an attack on her freedom of speech.

"I have been under threat of Shiites in Bahrain since 2005 when I wrote that the leader of Iraq's Shiites, Ayatollah Sistani, had supported U.S. invasion of Iraq in the beginning but I never thought that I would one day become the target of a violent attack." And she added "Until the unrest in February-March, we were living in a safe and prosperous country. Now, things have dramatically changed."

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## **Three charges dropped against medics**

Daily Tribune (24.10.2011) / HRWF (25.10.2011) - <http://www.hrwf.net> - The Public Prosecution dropped three charges previously made against the 20 Salmaniya Medical Complex (SMC) staff comprising doctors, medical workers and other hospital staff. The decision was made during an initial hearing of the Civil Court Retrial.

The dropped charges are those under article 165 (incitement of hatred for the regime), article 168 (disturbing public security by spreading rumours) and article 173 (inciting others to commit criminal acts) of the Bahraini Penal Code.

The Public Prosecution added that it would not rely on confession evidence to prove the remaining charges; it would instead rely on evidence including videos, physical evidence and eyewitness testimonies.

One of the defendants' lawyers requested the court to lift the travel ban against the defendants, allow them to return their jobs, allow private medical inspections of the defendants, listen to their testimonies and allow their lawyers to summon witnesses to testify before the court.

The next session has been scheduled for November 28. All defendants remain on bail before the verdict is announced.

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## **Bahraini government proposes freedom of expression amendments following National Dialogue**

Information Affairs Authority (24.10.2011) / HRWF (24.10.2011) - <http://www.hrwf.net> - Parliament to vote on amendments in coming weeks

1. The government of Bahrain yesterday introduced a proposal for legal reform to the Bahraini Parliament that it terms the Freedom of Expression Amendments. These proposed amendments include (i) changing the language of Article 168 of the Penal

Code; (ii) deleting Article 134A of the Penal Code; (iii) deleting Article 174 of the Penal Code; and (iv) adding a new provision to the Code, Article 69 bis.

2. The proposed Freedom of Expression Amendments are an initiative by the government to provide stronger guarantees for freedom of expression in Bahrain by narrowing the circumstances under which individuals can be charged with speech-related activity under the country's criminal laws. This initiative follows other cutting-edge action by the government in the human rights arena, including the establishment by the King of an independent expert commission to investigate alleged human rights abuses; the creation of a Fund for Victims that grants various types of remedies to those who have been the subject of human rights abuses or are subject to such abuses in the future; and the issuance of royal pardons for persons accused of speech-related offences under Bahraini law.

3. It is proposed that the amendments would apply retroactively where this would be beneficial to the accused in a pending case.

4. The government's proposed Freedom of Expression Amendments represent an important step in the process of modernizing its laws. The government will continue to review its laws and practices to ensure continued compliance with its commitment to human rights and obligations under international instruments. This will include reviewing other provisions of the Penal Code, as well as the Press Law, with a view to proposing additional amendments that further promote and safeguard the rights of individuals in Bahrain.

5. The Freedom of Expression amendments (discussed below) will now be put before parliament and will be voted upon in the coming weeks. The proposal is one of the outcomes of the National Dialogue and is a priority for the government. It is therefore hoped that Parliament will deal with it in an expedited manner.

#### Article 168

6. The current text of Article 168 is provided in the annex. Under the proposed new law, Article 168 is amended to read as follows:

(a) Imprisonment for a period of no more than two years and a fine not exceeding BD 200, or either penalty, may be imposed on any person who deliberately disseminates a false statement knowing that it may be damaging to national security, public order or public health, and consequently such damage occurs. (b) A statement can only be subject to criminal penalties for damaging national security under subparagraph (a) if it (i) deliberately incites imminent violence; (ii) it is likely to incite such violence and (iii) there is a direct and immediate connection between the statement and the likelihood or occurrence of such violence.

7. The government of Bahrain takes very seriously its commitments under international law, including its obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which guarantees freedom of expression within certain limits under Article 19.

8. The language of the proposed amendment takes into account the most recent pronouncements by the UN on the evolving norms relating to freedom of expression under the ICCPR. The text of the new article is drawn from the language of Article 19 itself, as well as best practices under international law set out in the UN Human Rights Committee's General Comment No. 34 issued in July 2011 and recent pronouncements of the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Opinion and Expression on this issue.

#### Articles 134A and 174

9. The text of Articles 134A and 174, currently part of the Penal Code, is provided in an Annex to this press release.

10. The government proposes to delete these two speech-related crimes from the Penal Code in their entirety. There will be no new crime that replaces these provisions.

#### Article 69 bis

11. The government proposes to add a new provision, Article 69 bis. This provision would be of general application to the Penal Code and is intended to be an interpretative aid to other laws regulating freedom of expression in the Kingdom of Bahrain as well. The provision would read as follows:

Restrictions defined in this or any other law on the freedom of expression shall be construed as limited to those which are compatible with the values of a democratic society. The exercise of the freedom of expression can only be punished through restrictions that are so limited.

12. This general clause is intended to ensure that, in interpreting and applying the law, lawyers and judges pay due regard to Bahrain's commitment to restricting freedom of expression only where such restriction is compatible with the values of a democratic society.

#### Article 168

##### Annex - New Proposed Provisions

(a) Imprisonment for a period of no more than two years and a fine not exceeding BD 200, or either penalty, may be imposed on any person who deliberately disseminates a false statement knowing that it may be damaging to national security, public order or public health, and consequently such damage occurs.

(b) A statement can only be subject to criminal penalties for damaging national security under subparagraph (a) if it (i) deliberately incites imminent violence; (ii) it is likely to incite such violence and (iii) there is a direct and immediate connection between the statement and the likelihood or occurrence of such violence.

#### Article 69 bis

Restrictions defined in this or any other law on the freedom of expression shall be construed as limited to those which are compatible with the values of a democratic society. The exercise of the freedom of expression cannot be punished in the absence of restrictions so limited.

##### Annex - Current Penal Code Provisions to be Amended or Deleted

#### Article 134A (to be deleted)

A punishment of imprisonment for a period of no less than 3 months and a fine of no less than BD 100, or either penalty, shall be imposed upon any citizen who has attended abroad in whatever capacity and without authorization from the Government, any conference, public meeting or seminar or has participated in any manner whatsoever in the deliberations thereof with the intent of discussing political, social or economic conditions in the State of Bahrain or in any other state so as to weaken financial confidence the State of Bahrain or undermine its prestige or standing or to worsen political relations between Bahrain and these countries.

The same punishment shall be inflicted upon any person who liaises abroad without any authorization from the Government with representatives or delegates of any foreign country, association, organization, society, federation, union or institution with the intent of discussing any of the matters contained in the preceding paragraph.

Article 168 (to be amended)

A punishment of imprisonment for a period of no more than 2 years and a fine not exceeding BD200, or either penalty, shall be inflicted upon any person who willfully broadcasts any false or malicious news reports, statements or rumours or spreads adverse publicity, if such conduct results in disturbing public security, terrorizing people or causing damage to public interest.

The same penalty shall be inflicted upon any person who possesses, either personally or through others, any documents or publications containing anything provided for in the preceding paragraph, if they are intended for distribution or reading by others, and upon any person who possesses any publishing, recording or promotion device intended, even on a temporary basis, for the printing, recording or broadcast of any of the above.

Article 174 (to be deleted)

A punishment of imprisonment for a period of no more than 2 years and a fine not exceeding BD200, or either penalty, shall be inflicted upon any person who produces or possess, with the intent of trading, distribution, posting or display, any pictures designed to cause offence to the country's reputation whether by a presentation that is contrary to the truth, by giving an improper description, presenting unbecoming aspects or by any other method.

The same penalty shall be inflicted upon any person who imports, exports, copies deliberately either personally or through others any of the above for the aforesaid purpose, or any person who advertises such materials, displays them for sale, trading therein even in a secretive manner, and any person who provides such items directly or indirectly even free of charge and in any way whatsoever. The same penalty shall be inflicted upon whoever distributes or delivers such materials for distribution by any means.

In case of recurrence of the offence, the punishment shall be both imprisonment and payment of fine without prejudice to the provisions of Article 76.

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