



GULF INSTITUTE
for Democracy and Human Rights

HIGHLIGHTS

ON THE CRACKDOWN ON HUMAN RIGHTS IN BAHRAIN IN 2017



www.gidhr.org
info@gidhr.org

PREFACE

2017 witnessed a rough escalation in the Bahraini authorities' wave of violence against the peaceful opposition and innocent Bahrainis. Throughout the harsh courts' sentences and the human rights violations, Bahrain announced publicly **“No one can protect the Bahrainis”**.

National and international human rights organisations expressed their concerns over the **“alarming deterioration”** in human rights situation in Bahrain as it significantly worsened since mid-2016.

EXTRAJUDICIAL KILLING

The Bahraini authorities welcomed 2017 by unlawfully executing 3 men who were convicted without evidences, sentenced to death following unfair trials, and subjected to various kinds of torture. 12 other Bahrainis were victims of extrajudicial killing, most of which were targets of live gunshots. Moreover, 14 Bahrainis were sentenced to death in politically motivated cases; 6 of them were referred before military courts. While life sentences were issued almost on a daily basis.

MILITARY COURTS TRY CIVILIANS

In April 2017, King Hamad Bin Isa issued a royal decree approving amendments to the military judicial system allowing military courts to try civilians. Committee against Torture (CAT) of the HRC's Office of High Commission for Human Rights and other international human rights organisations expressed their concerns over the rights of prisoners and detainees to fair trial.



TRIAL OF SHEIKH ALI SALMAN

Sheikh Ali Salman, who is already serving a nine-year prison sentence for allegedly inciting hatred and insulting the interior ministry, was charged, along with former MPs Sheikh Hassan Sultan and Ali Al Aswad, of colluding with spying for “Qatar” over 6-year-old phone calls. However, Al-Aswad said: **“Everything that was mentioned in this call was under the scrutiny of the Royal Court and the highest authorities in Bahrain. It is 6-year-old event and nothing new.”** Sheikh Ali Salman, on his part, denied all the charges raised against him. Commenting on the recordings, the Qatari Foreign Ministry issued a statement stating that **“Bahrain was aware of these calls and what proves it is that these calls were made on ordinary phones in Bahrain and Manama did not raise the issue over the past years.”**


SENTENCE AGAINST AYATOLLAH QASSIM & ATTACK ON DIRAZ




On 26 January 2017, armed civilians affiliated to Bahrain's Ministry of Interior attacked protesters in the Diraz peaceful sit-in, which had been staged since 20 June 2016, with live bullets. This attack came after a month of a failed attempt to disperse the protesters. The attack led to the injury of a young protester (18 years old) with a bullet in his head and his death 2 months later.

On the early morning of 21 May 2017, Bahrain's Fourth High Criminal Court ruled a 1-year imprisonment against Ayatollah Sheikh Isa Qassim and 2 of his assistants. It also imposed a BD 100,000 fine for each of them, as well as confiscating the amount deposited in Sheikh Qassim's account (BD 3,367,301) in addition to 2 properties registered to his name. Moreover, the court sentenced each of them a fine of BD 1000, over collecting money for general purposes and without a license. The Bahrain authorities had tried Ayatollah Sheikh Isa Qassim and his assistants in a case linked to collecting the "Khums" religious money.

Following the sentence, on 23rd May 2017, heavily armed security forces raided Diraz and attacked the protesters outside Ayatollah Sheikh Isa Qassim's house. The attack claimed the lives of 5 civilians, injured hundreds, 8 of whom suffered from serious injuries and were in the intensive care unit, and witnessed the arrest of 286.



International human rights organisations condemned the verdict against Ayatollah Qassim, and described it as arbitrary and politically-based. However, the Bahraini authorities didn't hesitate to besiege Sheikh Qassim's house, place him under house arrest and hinder his private doctors from following-up his medical condition. His family members who wish to visit him were harassed, held for long periods and subjected to strict measures. Ayatollah Qassim remained under house arrest for more than 520 days.



Despite the authorities forcibly dispersed the sit-in outside Sheikh Qassim's house in Diraz, the village remained under siege until the moment of writing this report. Furthermore, the security authorities has been preventing the country's Shiite majority from holding their largest Friday prayers at Imam Al-Sadiq Mosque in Diraz since June 2016, for more than 75 consecutive weeks.

TARGETING ACTIVISTS

Furthermore, the Bahraini authorities enforced a clampdown on freedom of expression; human rights defenders and their families, lawyers, journalists, political activists, Shiite clerics, and peaceful protesters were the authorities' main targets. Bahrain's Penal Code was increasingly used to criminalise any action related to freedom of expression.

Around 90 human rights defender in Bahrain are banned from travelling without judicial warrant, in an attempt to prevent them from reporting the blatant human rights violations to the international community or participating in any international event.

Additional accusations and cases against detained human rights and political activists were held to harshen their sentences. Nabeel Rajab, a prominent human rights defender and president of Bahrain Centre for Human Rights (BCHR) was sentenced to additional 2 years in prison over television interviews he made with foreign media outlets. However, he is persecuted over another case in which he might face up to **10 years in jail over "tweets"**, if convicted.

BAHRAIN'S NATIONAL SECURITY AGENCY

There were serious allegations about torture in Bahraini prisons and investigation centres, especially at the National Security Agency (NSA). Amnesty International said that it received reports of 8 cases of "government critics being tortured in detention" in May 2017 alone. For example, Ebtisam Al-Saegh, a Bahraini human rights defender who was arrested on 26 May 2017, said she was blindfolded, sexually assaulted, beaten and kept standing for long hours. "They took away my humanity", she said.

Three Bahraini human rights organisations: Gulf Institute for Democracy and Human Rights (GIDHR), Bahrain Forum for Human Rights (BFHR), and SALAM for Democracy and Human Rights issued an extensive report, titled "Chambers of Death" to highlight the top violations committed by members of National Security Agency (NSA) against citizens. It further documents the names of a numbers of victims who were subjected to torture.



TARGETING WOMEN

▶ Bahraini women were one of the main targets of the security authorities. 10 women prisoners of conscience are still detained over political-based charges. Many other women were arrested and freed throughout the year, one of which is Ebtisam Al Saegh, a prominent human rights defender, who was a victim of the National Security Agency (NSA).

ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCE

▶ What worsens the situation more, 15 Bahraini citizen were victims of enforced disappearance. Human rights organisations expressed their fear over the fate of those citizens and that they be subjected to torture and charged over confessions extracted under torture.

SILENCING INDEPENDENT MEDIA

▶ Al-Wasat Newspaper, the only independent newspaper in Bahrain, was suspended and closed. The authorities obviously were trying to shut down all the opposite voices.

HALTING POLITICAL WORK

▶ In the same context, the National Democratic Action Society (Wa'ad), the second largest opposing society in Bahrain, was dissolved. Thus the public political work in Bahrain reached an end.

THE MOST BLATANT VIOLATIONS

IN 2017

15

EXTRAJUDICIAL KILLINGS

12 of them by live gunshots
3 of whom were executed



14

WERE SENTENCED TO DEATH IN POLITICALLY MOTIVATED CASES

6 of whom were referred before military courts



155

BAHRAINIS WERE STRIPPED OF THEIR CITIZENSHIP



ABOUT
40

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS AND POLITICAL ACTIVISTS

WERE SUMMONED FOR INTERROGATION BY SAUDI ARABIA'S NATIONAL SECURITY AGENCY (NSA)

THEY EXPERIENCED



Torture



Extortion



Travel bans



Pressures and threats
to work as informants



Their homes
were attacked



AROUND 90 HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS ARE BANNED FROM TRAVELLING

ADDITIONAL CASES WERE INTRODUCED AGAINST DETAINED POLITICAL ACTIVISTS AND HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS



SHEIKH ALI SALMAN

was faced by a new accusation of conspiring with Qatar, which he denied



AYATOLLAH SHEIKH ISA QASSIM



- Ayatollah Sheikh Isa Qassim **has been put under house arrest** for more than **520** days

- Sheikh Qassim was **convicted and sentenced**

- The village of **Diraz** was besieged



- **The largest Friday prayers were banned** for more than **75 consecutive weeks**



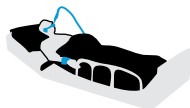
- Sit-in outside Ayatollah Sheikh Isa Qassim **was dispersed forcibly using live gunshots and excessive force:**



5 CIVILIANS WERE KILLED



HUNDREDS WERE INJURED



8 SUFFERED FROM SERIOUS INJURIES AND WERE IN THE INTENSIVE CARE UNIT (ICU)



286 WERE DETAINED

- **The only independent newspaper (Al-Wasat) was suspended and closed**



- **The national Democratic Action Society (Wa'ad) was dissolved**



- **10 women** are detained over politically based cases, and many others were arrested and freed throughout the year.



HIGHLIGHTS



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Gulf Institute for Democracy and Human Rights (GIDHR), is a civil non-governmental and non-profit organization aiming to promote the respect for democratic principles, as well as establishing the human rights and social justice principles, and stopping the human rights violations in the Gulf Region in general and in Bahrain in particular. Head quartered in Sydney, Australia GIDHR has the right to open branches in other regions, has legal character and independent financial disclosure. GIDHR is seeking to be in the ranks of the major organizations defending democratic and human rights principles and values through contributing to achieve peace and justice for all in the Gulf States.



designed by:

+61413984959 | +61424610661 | +61421237922
email: info@gidhr.org