



GULF INSTITUTE
for Democracy and Human Rights

UPDATES ON THE CRACKDOWN ON
HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE GULF

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BAHRAIN : RELEASE BAHRAINI PRISONERS CAMPAIGN



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#RELEASE_BAHRAINI_PRISONERS CAMPAIGN

Bahraini human rights organisations and activists launched an online campaign calling for the release of the Bahraini prisoners, amid the threat of Covid19-. The campaign was launched in Arabic for the first few days and followed by the English hashtag later on.

The campaign reach recorded 12 millions in its first few days only.

67 Arab and international human rights organizations, including GIDHR, called on the Bahraini authorities to respond to the call of the High Commissioner for Human Rights for the immediate release of prisoners of conscience and to take urgent and humanitarian measures to confront the spread of Coronavirus.

The organizations confirmed that prisons and detention centers are the most vulnerable to infectious diseases and their conditions do not give a chance for physical distancing. Thus, it is impossible for overcrowded prisons to apply the World Health Organization recommendations and guidelines to confront this pandemic.

The organisations added: "The

Bahrain government have a moral and legal responsibility to guarantee and ensure the health for its citizens and residents, including prisoners, and to protect them from the most deadly infectious diseases, as stipulated by the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (called the Nelson Mandela Rules). The detention of large numbers of individuals constitutes a very significant obstacle to health care in light of the spread of a serious epidemic such as Coronavirus and the measures recommended by medical specialists of social and physical distancing, is not possible in prisons. Therefore, the government is obligated to take urgent action by releasing prisoners, and abiding by their obligations towards prisoners. According to international human rights law "states are obliged to take the necessary measures to prevent any danger to public health and ensure the provision of medical care for all those who need it".

Read the full media release here: <http://gidhr.org/Home/MediaReleasesDetails/1064>

> Bahrain

GIDHR INTERVIEWS

As a part of the #Release_Bahraini_Prisoners campaign GIDHR interviewed some activists and human rights defenders to call on the Bahraini authorities to release Bahraini prisoners amid serious concerns over the Coronavirus outbreak and the poor conditions they are suffering from inside the prisons.

CRAIG FOSTER



The international community should pressure Bahrain to release prisoners amid the Coronavirus epidemic, sports star Craig Foster, former Socceros Captain said in the interview which was live streamed via Instagram.

Foster said "I made it clear that the rest of the world, like us, should be pressuring on the Bahrain government and the royal family to show that all of those that have been prosecuted, for non-criminal reasons, should be released," indicating that this is similar to what we witnessed in case of Bahraini football player, Hakeem Al-Araibi. Craig Foster noted that the

international community, including the US and the UK, who have a very close relationship with Bahrain, should pressure on the government to ensure that the rule of law is applied as well as the democracy that people have been calling for so many years.

Craig called on the ruling family to promote the democracy of the people of Bahrain, indicating that Bahrain has a crew of nationals. He also demanded the country to grant them freedom of speech, freedom of religions and the human rights they should have as part of their national rights.

He also urged the Bahraini government to release prisoners of conscience, journalists and athletes, including Nabeel Rajab, Mahmoud Al-Jaziri, Abduljalil Al-Singace, Hussein Ali Mahdi and others, stressing that keeping them, along with others, behind bars, is unacceptable.

EVAN JONES



Activist Evan Jones sent a clear message to the Bahraini government in which he said that

> Bahrain

COVID19- is a global pandemic and that all political prisoners should be released, explaining that "this is not about political pressure, but human decency and providing essential health care protections to individuals inside Bahrain's borders." Jones said "During this time, not just Bahrain, but all countries around the world have to learn how to treat the vulnerable and marginalized, and in this case it's Bahrain's prison population," stressing that for this reason "I called for the release of all political prisoners". Jones expressed concern over the most vulnerable, including those who are over sixty, the sick who are waiting for their trials and those whose prison terms will end quite soon.

He also stated that Bahrain allies should raise their voices and not stay silent, because in this situation, silence would almost be the equivalent of complicity. These states need to mobilize their resources and to speak to their counterparts to ensure that this crisis does not go unaddressed. Jones stressed that his demands are a simple process to provide the right of life to these people, explaining that "human rights are indivisible, they are universal. To put it quite simply, they can't stop at the cell door or according to anyone's political beliefs."

Evan Jones is a refugee advocate who has worked on human rights and refugee protection issues for

almost a decade. Evan is currently the Deputy Director at Asylum Access Malaysia.

You can watch the full interview here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d1p752tMOoc&feature=youtu.be>

BRIAN DOOLEY



Brian Dooley, Senior Advisor to UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders and at Human Rights First, said that we are in a new context because of the Coronavirus, indicating that "people, like Naji Fateel and other human rights defenders, should not be imprisoned with or without the virus."

Dooley stated "I think that there is a new conversation now to be had to because of the virus, i.e. the government ought to be emptying its prisons," indicating that "it's just puzzling and frustrating that they [Bahraini authorities] haven't taken that obvious next step of releasing the peaceful opposition figures and human rights defenders, [especially that] some of these people are old and have underlying health concerns." "If for the moment not forgetting the argument that they shouldn't be in prison at all and

concentrate on the other argument that they ought to be released on health grounds, I think that this needs to happen fast."

"Whatever the government thinks about those political prisoners on a personal level, it really ought to be thinking about its own employee, the prison officers and prison guards. The more prisoners you have, the more likely that they are going to get infected and the more likely that more guards get infected," he added.

Brian Dooley stressed that keeping political detainees in prison in unsanitary conditions would fuel the situation, indicating that time is running and every delay in releasing these people would subject them to a greater chance of being infected. He noted that the infection of one of the prisoners could do more damage to the reputation of the ruling family.

Watch the full interview here: <https://youtu.be/U1oWvmc-HGg>

PHIL ROBERTSON



Phil Robertson, the deputy Director of Human Rights Watch in South Asia urged the Bahraini government

to release prisoners after the Coronavirus outbreak.

"We have been calling not just in Bahrain, but around the world, for governments to release political prisoners, to reduce populations in their prisons, to reduce overcrowding, and to recognize that if they don't act very quickly, these prisons could be container boxes for COVID19- infection that will infect a large population of inmates and detainees," he said.

Commenting on the visit carried out by the National Institution for Human Rights and the statements of its chairperson, Maria Khouri, Robertson confirmed that "there is plenty of documentation that show that in fact Bahrain prisons don't respect human rights," indicating that "this is a game that have being played by the Bahraini authorities, the reality is that the human rights abuses still happen in the prisons."

Robertson stressed that political prisoners should be released, because they were convicted for exercising their rights. "They should not face a potential death sentence because of the covid19- outbreak," he added. He noted that "the reality is that covid19- is going to get into the prisons in Bahrain and is going to cause significant damage."

He further explained that "by throwing community leaders in prison, the government of Bahrain is shooting itself from the foot," stressing that "these people should

be released, they should be allowed to help their communities, and they should be allowed to speak up, voice their opinions and act to protect the rights of the community that they represent."

Full interview is available here: <https://youtu.be/hTWjTyHewk8>

FIONA PATTEN MP



Australian MP Fiona Patten described keeping prisoners in Bahraini prisons as a human rights "travesty".

"Even without the virus, it is something that is no longer acceptable in modern society around the world," she said.

She noted that amid the lack of social isolation and distancing and sanitary services, the government is putting prisoners' lives at risk, stressing that "when we have such a health risk, then it is even more important that we act humanly and ensure that prisoners are not at risk of losing their life."

"The UN has a very important role to play, but also other countries and other governments like Australia, and like the US and the UK. The stand that you won't pass is the

stand that you accept, so if we do not call this out, then we are accepting it, and if this is something that we don't accept in our own country, then we should not accept it with our trading partners," she further stated.

"We should be firmly calling for the release of these prisoners, many of them, I understand, have not had an opportunity to defend themselves in court, many of them have had no legal or justice process," noting that "if we are to maintain our relations with Bahrain, and if Bahrain wants to maintain relations with other countries, then they must head the UN cause, they must head all of that causes that freedom of political speech, freedom of movement, is intrinsic to a safe globe, a safe world, and a progressive world."

Patten addressed the King saying "With due respect, what are you afraid of? If you are in favor of a form of democracy, in favor of a form of free speech, you can't only protect the speech that you agree with. You must protect all speech. You must allow those that you may not agree with to speak freely, and particularly if there is nonviolence involved."

Speaking about the House of Representatives in Bahrain, Patten said "If that was your family? Is that the type of justice that you would accept for you own family members? Who knows when their opinions may be on the other side, who knows when they may be have

to defend their own opinions?"

Watch the full interview here:
<https://youtu.be/Thu1HuqYMLo>

PROFESSOR TOM COLLINS



Professor Tom Collins, former Head of the Royal College of Surgeons of Ireland in Bahrain, said "all medics, all over the world, should call on regimes to grant political dissenters an amnesty."

Collins further noted that "prison is a huge congregation setting, we expect a very explicit effort to protect prisoners from COVID19-," adding that "congregation setting evidently represent an enormous risk for the spread of COVID19-, and for the health and well-being of the inmates."

"Prisoners not just in Bahrain, but in any political prison in any place in the world, right now are being placed in danger by being in prison, in a level that they will be exposed to a danger that they should not be exposed to."

Collins confirmed "We have learned from COVID19- a critical lesson, that healthcare is also a political issue," indicating to a call launched by a previous health official in the UK for

the resignation of PM Boris Johnson after his speech about the herd's immunity plan.

"I think in Bahrain we have to recognize, that is primarily a political issue, as how the issue of COVID19- is dealt with, in the prisons and possibly outside the prisons," he stated. "This has to be questioned."

"Internationally, Donald Trump has refused to lift pretensions on Iran. As Iran tries to come to terms with the challenging of COVID19- in its population. In refusing to do that, it seems to me that Donald Trump is changing COVID19- into a weapon against the citizens of Iran, by not taking positive action to insure that the country is able to deal with this challenge."

Tom Collins was the Head of the Royal College of Surgeons of Ireland in Bahrain and left his post in 2013. "I left Bahrain in 2013 where I was the head of the medical school and I was uncomfortable because I couldn't reconcile my own ethical commitments and convictions on medical care, health care, and academic freedom with the political environment in which I found myself in Bahrain," he stated.

Collins talked about what he witnessed in Bahrain. "I have seen trained nurses 7 years ago not provided jobs, which the explicit reason I was provided was security, however, the honest reason was their religious affiliation."

> Bahrain

"This is not a way that any medical system should be organized," he noted, stressing that "this need to be documented and challenged."

"I have no idea now about the equal access to health care in Bahrain, in the various hospitals, where everybody, regardless of political affiliation or any other identity character, whether they have free open access now." Collins stressed that this didn't happen while he was in Bahrain.

"On a personal level, I would very much like to see Nabeel Rajab, whom I met in Dublin in 2016, where

he was working on human rights and reconciliation at the time, and was arrested and tried after returning to Manama," Collins said.

He stressed his concern about Rajab's health, saying "I would like to welcome him to spend the quarantine in my home in Ireland, if that helps him in any way," noting that Rajab is "one of the thousands at risk of being imprisoned by Bahrain and other regimes in the world."

Full interview is available here: <https://youtu.be/h73P4lczb1g>

COVID-19 KNOCKS ON THE PRISONS' DOORS IN BAHRAIN

When jailed Bahraini activist Abdullah Habeeb Swar developed a bad cough that lasted several days, his 14 cell mates feared he might have contracted the coronavirus and would spread it through their overcrowded wing.

They share a cell designed to sleep eight in one of three wings in Manama's Jaw prison reserved for detainees sentenced on security-related charges.

"You can imagine how scared they were," Swar told Reuters by telephone, referring to last month's coughing fits. He is one of hundreds of opposition politicians, activists, journalists and human rights defenders sentenced in mass trials. Detained in 2019 after six years in hiding and serving a -40year term,

Swar said he was not seen by a doctor. On the other hand, a group of prisoners watched the report aired on television from inside the prison and listened to the NIHR report, and stressed that the report is completely false and is a play that has nothing to do with the reality of the situation.

One of those prisoners was the imprisoned journalist Mahmoud Al-Jaziri who said that the report displayed the most recent building in the prison which was opened about a week before launching the report. Al-Jaziri added that only a few prisoners were transferred to that building, while prisoners are piled up in the old building, like building number 1 and 4 or in the tightly sealed or non-ventilated ones

like building number 13, 12 and 14. After that the Ministry of Interior took retaliatory measures against Mahmoud Al-Jaziri on 8th April 2020 and transferred him to solitary confinement. From its side, Bahrain Press Association (BPA) called on the

NIHR to pressure in order to release Al-Jaziri from solitary confinement and to perform its duties "impartially and professionally". The association demanded the release of Al-Jaziri and all prisoners "as a precautionary step to face the Coronavirus outbreak."



SAUDI AUTHORITIES CONTINUE TO HOLD SECRET TRIALS

The Saudi authorities are continuing to hold secret trials, ensuring that judicial proceedings in Saudi Arabia fall far short of international fair trial standards. The Saudi public are denied access to attend trials, in the knowledge that requesting access puts them at risk of imprisonment and torture. The authorities also deny access to international observers, including embassy officials, despite Saudi media claiming that they are able to attend. Even foreign embassies have repeatedly been denied access to attend trials in Saudi Arabia where MP James Cleverly said, in a response

to a written question tabled by Conservative MP Crispin Blunt, that "the UK attends trials of international importance in all countries where permitted. The UK, along with other embassies in Saudi Arabia, has requested and been denied access to each and every trial we have been aware of since October 2018, with the exception of the trials for those involved in the killing of Jamal Khashoggi." Moreover, MP James Cleverly raised his concerns about the continued detention of women's rights activists in Saudi Arabia. "We are concerned about the continue

> Saudi Arabia

detention of women's rights activists in Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia remains a Foreign and Commonwealth Office human rights priority country, particularly because of the use of the death penalty and restrictions on women's rights, freedom of expression, freedom of assembly and freedom of religion or belief. We will continue to call for political detainees, including women's rights defenders, to be given adequate legal representation. We have pressed for due process and raised concerns over the use of solitary confinement and the use of torture," he said.



PROMINENT SAUDI HUMAN RIGHTS ADVOCATE DIES IN PRISONS DUE TO MEDICAL NEGLIGENCE

Abdullah Al-Hamid (69 years old) a leading Saudi human rights figure has died after suffering a stroke on 9th April 2020. Al-Hamid spent the final seven years of his life in prison following his conviction in March 2013 on charges relating to his peaceful political and human rights activism. His death was announced by the Saudi human rights organization ALQST. Dr Abdullah al-Hamid suffered from hypertension, and was told three months ago by a doctor that he needed to undergo heart surgery. He was threatened by prison authorities

that if he told his family about his health condition, they would cut his communication with his family. Dr Abdullah al-Hamid had suffered a stroke on 9 April and remained in detention, despite being in a coma in the intensive care unit at al-Shumaisi Hospital in Riyadh. "We hold Saudi authorities responsible for the death of Dr Al-Hamid because of their intentional negligence and treatment delay," Dr Husa Al-Madi, member of ALQst human rights organisation, said. "Dr Abdullah Al-Hamid was nominated to receive

> Saudi Arabia

Nobel Prize this year, after receiving other remarkable international awards, along with members of AlQst," she continued.

"Dr Abdullah Al-Hamid is among the most prominent activists calling for political and civil reforms. He was one of the founders of Hasm association, which was dissolved and all their members are arrested. Al-Hamid himself was arrested 6 times, last of which was when he died whilst behind bars. He believed that persistence and continuity are the sole way to achieve reform, which will drain the sources of terrorism," Al-Madi added.

Responding to news of his death, Michael Page, deputy Middle East director at Human Rights Watch said: "We have lost one of the leading lights of Saudi Arabia's human rights movement, but his message and the many activists he inspired will live on and continue

pushing for reform. It is unconscionable that Abdullah al-Hamid was forced to spend his final years in prison merely for criticizing Saudi Arabia's rampant human rights abuses."

"Dozens of human rights and women's rights activists continue to remain detained solely for their peaceful activism, and often after unfair trials. They should all be released immediately and unconditionally," Page added.

Moreover, Lynn Maalouf, Amnesty International's Middle East Research Director, said: "We are devastated to learn of Dr Abdullah al-Hamid's passing while he remained in detention for his peaceful activism."

"We again call on the Saudi Arabian authorities to immediately and unconditionally release all those still imprisoned solely for peacefully exercising their human rights," Maalouf added.

SECURITY FORCES SHOT A SAUDI NATIONAL REFUSED TO GIVE UP HIS HOME FORCIBLY

A man, who identified himself as Abdul Rahim Ahmad Mahmoud al-Hwaiti, said in a video posted online he was from the town of al-Khraybah in the northwest Red Sea region. He and other residents were being pressured by the government to give up their properties and accept financial compensation, he said.

Al Hwaiti, who refused government orders to give up his home to make way for a new mega-project, was killed by security forces.

After his murder, authorities arrested eight members of the Al-Hwaiti tribe in the north-western town of Al-Khurraybah. Al-Qst sources say some of these men were arrested for coming to the defence

> Saudi Arabia

of a kidnapped child, Salem bin Rashid al-Taqiqi. The child was driven away in a civilian car, but when family members pursued the kidnappers to try to free the child, it transpired that the kidnappers were from the Mabaheth secret police. They said the child had been kidnapped in order to detain him after he wrote on the walls the slogan "We Will Not Be Moved".

In the video Abdul Rahim criticised NEOM, saying the village residents had been forcibly removed from their homes after facing pressure from the government and rejecting financial compensation to move. Al Hwaiti continued to say he expected to be targeted for refusing to bow to government pressure.

"I would not be surprised if they come and kill me in my home now like they

do in Egypt, throw weapons in your home and call you a terrorist... this is my home and I'll protect it," he said.

In the same context, a Saudi activist in London was warned to expect 'the same fate as Jamal Khashoggi' after alerting the world to a tribe's eviction from land earmarked for the Crown Prince's new megacity.

Alya Abutayah Alhwaiti claims she received death threats on the phone and on Twitter from people she believes are supporters of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman.

It came after she raised international awareness about Neom - a planned city which will stretch across the Tabuk region's border with Jordan - the construction of which will force out the Howeitat tribe who have lived in the area for hundreds of years.



GULF INSTITUTE
for Democracy and Human Rights



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. Headquartered 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.

معهد الخليج للديمقراطية وحقوق الإنسان منظمة غير ربحية وغير حكومية، تم تأسيسه في أستراليا ويهدف إلى تعزيز ونشر ثقافة الديمقراطية، كما يسعى لتحقيق مبادئ حقوق الإنسان والعدالة الاجتماعية وإيقاف الانتهاكات في دول الخليج. وله الحق في فتح فروع أخرى في مناطق أخرى، ويكون له شخصية اعتبارية وذمة مالية مستقلة ولا يستهدف من نشاطه جني الربح التجاري. يسعى معهد الخليج للديمقراطية وحقوق الإنسان لأن يكون في مصاف كبرى المنظمات المدافعة عن حقوق الإنسان عبر المساهمة في تحقيق السلام والعدالة في دول الخليج.

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