

“Bahrain Political Prisoners and Human Rights Defenders”

Americans for Democracy & Human Rights in Bahrain (ADHRB), the Bahrain Institute for Rights and Democracy (BIRD), the Bahrain Center for Human Rights (BCHR), the International Federation for Human Rights, World Organization Against Torture, Amnesty International, the Gulf Center for Human Rights (GCHR), Alsalam Foundation, and Human Rights Watch

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On 26 June 2015, Americans for Democracy & Human Rights in Bahrain (ADHRB), the Bahrain Institute for Rights and Democracy (BIRD), the Bahrain Center for Human Rights (BCHR), the International Federation for Human Rights, World Organization Against Torture, Amnesty International, the Gulf Center for Human Rights (GCHR), Alsalam Foundation, and Human Rights Watch, co-sponsored an event entitled “Political Prisoners & Human Rights Defenders in Bahrain” at the 29th session of the UN Human Rights Council. Mr. **Husain Abdulla**, Executive Director of ADHRB, moderated the panel, which included Ms. **Nedal al-Salman**, Women and Children Rights Officer of BCHR; Mr. **Ibrahim Demistani**, Bahraini medic and recently released political prisoner (via Skype); Mr. **Said Haddadi**, a Middle East and North Africa Researcher at Amnesty International (Via Skype); Ms. **Maryam al-Khawaja**, Co-director of GCHR; and Ms. **Safya Akorri**, an attorney and Mission Delegate of the Observatory program led by International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) and World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT).

For a full summary of the event, continue reading, or click [here](#) for a PDF. Click [here](#) to watch a recording of the event.

Mr. **Husain Abdulla** opened the panel by presenting ADHRB, BIRD, and BCHR’s report, entitled “Inside Jau: Government Brutality in Bahrain’s Central Prison.” Mr. **Abdulla** highlighted the staggering number of political prisoners in the country, including all prominent political leaders and human rights defenders. After bringing attention to a riot that took place in Jau Prison on 10 March 2015, Mr. **Abdulla** then described the brutal response of Bahraini authorities to the prisoners’ collective demands for better conditions. He highlighted that “torture in the prison is still ongoing”.

Ms. **Nedal al-Salman** began by explaining that the situation of human rights in Bahrain could be understood by posing a simple question: “Where are the majority of human rights defenders, bloggers, and photographers in the country?” She then pointed to a number of joint communications reports by the UN’s Special Procedures which show a pattern of arbitrary arrest and criminal sentencing of these individuals. Ms. **al-Salman** also underlined that around 400 of Bahrain’s political prisoners are legal minors. She presented a series of child political prisoner cases, including minors aged 11 – 17 years; their prison terms ranged from 6 months to life. She also expressed concern for the other violations against minors, who

have in various cases been subjected to torture upon arrest, or in a more recent trend, have also had their citizenship revoked without due process.

Mr. **Ibrahim al-Dimestani**, introduced himself as a health worker who suffered from the Bahraini government's violations of medical impartiality in February and March 2011. Having been recently released from Jau, he described the poor conditions in the prison. "The worst conditions are in Building 4," he said. That compound holds around 1,020 prisoners, almost half of the prisoners in Jau. He then described the various humanitarian concerns related to overcrowding in the prison. Pointing to unhealthy conditions that leave prisoners susceptible to diseases, he also highlighted the brutality of the prison authorities. As an example, he referenced one former prison officer that he remembers as being violent towards him; today, that man is a member of ISIS. Mr. **al-Dimestani** concluded by asking the international community to keep pressure on Bahrain to grant access to the Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

Mr. **Said Haddadi** welcomed the recent release of Bahrain 13 member Ibrahim Sharif, but said that his release was not reflective of the constant violations and legislations carried out by the government of Bahrain to restrict human rights and fundamental freedoms. Referring to an Amnesty International observer who attended the trial of Sheikh Ali Salman--the head of main opposition society al-Wefaq who was sentenced to 4 years in prison last week – Mr. **Haddadi** presented Amnesty International's conclusion that the trial's due process had not been respected. Mr. **Haddadi** also presented an assessment of Bahrain's national human rights institutions. He addressed the Second national report of the Ombudsman, which he commended for its account of the overcrowding in Bahrain's prisons. He regretted, however, that the report omitted significant details on human rights violations taking place within these detention facilities. Mr. **Haddadi** also expressed regret that the creation of national human rights institutions in Bahrain had not translated into accountability for ongoing human rights abuses. He concluded by calling on Bahrain to honor recommendations accepted during the BICI and to uphold rights to free expression.

Ms. **Maryam al-Khawaja** spoke about the situation of human rights defenders in Bahrain. She discussed both the conventional and unconventional tools used by the Bahraini government to punish human rights defenders. She also highlighted that, despite most human rights defenders being sentenced to long prison sentences in 2011, there have been continued incidents of harassment of human rights defenders. A number of these cases have surfaced so far in 2015, including those of Hussain Jawad, Nabeel Rajab, and Naji Fateel. She described the conventional punishments carried out against human rights defenders, including methods of torture such as physical beatings, electric shocks, sexual abuse, and insults. She also mentioned some unconventional punishments, among them the refusal of detained human rights defenders to attend funeral processions of family members, a right usually guaranteed

by Bahraini law. She ended by stressing that her release in September, after only a few weeks in prison, meant that “international pressure works.” She urged the international community to, through the Human Rights Council, pass a resolution under Item 4 on Bahrain.

Ms. **Safiya Akorri** discussed her recent visit to Bahrain, which she was able to carry out as a delegate of FIDH and the World Organization against Torture’s joint program, “The Observatory.” She described her difficulties in obtaining a visa, for which she applied eight times. She also explained the challenges she faced along the way, including the fact that she had planned on visiting the Kingdom with the intention of consulting with FIDH Deputy Secretary General Nabeel Rajab, who was unexpectedly arrested before her visit. The Public Prosecutor’s Office then denied Ms. Akorri access to Nabeel. During her visit, however, Ms. **Akorri** attested that she was able to report on the serious violations of human rights in Bahrain through consultations with victims and their families. She also described the worrying application of anti-terror laws to intimidate human rights defenders and peaceful activists.