



# General Assembly

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## Human Rights Council

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Human rights situations that require the Council's attention

### **Written statement\* submitted by Americans for Democracy & Human Rights in Bahrain Inc, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status**

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[31 May 2019]

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\* Issued as received, in the language(s) of submission only.



## **Bahrain's abusive Ministry of Interior police force and the issue of impunity**

Americans for Democracy & Human Rights in Bahrain (ADHRB) takes this opportunity at the 41st Session of the United Nations (UN) Human Rights Council (HRC) to raise concerns about Bahrain's Ministry of Interior (MOI) police force's integral role in human rights violations and the kingdom's general repression of dissent. Through a rigorous documentation program, ADHRB has verified the central role the MOI plays in Bahrain's systematic rights abuses. Building on this documentation, ADHRB released a report in April 2019 report entitled *Anatomy of a Police State* that examines this role in depth.<sup>1</sup>

### **General impunity**

The Government of Bahrain has fostered a culture of impunity within its institutions, including the MOI. MOI agencies are responsible for more than 3,000 specific rights violations from 2011 to the present, ranging from incidents of arbitrary detention and torture, to rape and extrajudicial killings. Despite the scope of abuses, at the end of 2017, only three officers had been imprisoned and only five percent of cases reported to the MOI Ombudsman had been referred for serious prosecution. In addition to this lack of accountability for perpetrators, members of the MOI involved in abuses have actually risen in the ranks and received promotions despite serious allegations of human rights violations.

### **MOI individuals complicit in rights abuses**

There is a pattern of police brutality and repression at every command level of the MOI, with widespread and systematic human rights violations being committed by a wide range of individuals in various units. The following individuals are exemplars of the larger pattern of abuse and impunity within the MOI.

*Sheikh Rashid bin Abdullah AlKhalifa* has been the Interior Minister of Bahrain since 2004. The thousands of rights violations attributed to the MOI could not occur without the knowledge and approval of the highest command echelon, up to Interior Minister Rashid. Violating human rights is a necessary means to the MOI's ultimate goal: enforcing compliance with the government through state oppression. In 2018, Sheikh Rashid announced that the kingdom's security forces would be taking new measures to "track down" activists for criticizing the government on social media. That same day, MOI police made at least five new arrests over such charges as "misusing social media."

*Tariq AlHassan* became Chief of Public Security after the MOI's violent security operations to suppress the mass pro-democracy protests in 2011. The various agencies of the MOI coordinate to perpetrate widespread and systematic human rights violations, including arbitrary detention and warrantless home raids; enforced disappearance; torture; lack of due process; substandard detention conditions; denial of healthcare; excessive force and police brutality; and religious discrimination. Most of these abuses could not occur without the knowledge and approval of AlHassan. AlHassan also publically justified the lethal May 2017 police raid on a peaceful sit-in at the village of Duraz that killed five protesters.

*Abdullah AlZayed* oversaw years of abuses as commander of the Special Security Force Command (SSFC). The SSFC is implicated in the majority of extrajudicial killings perpetrated by Bahraini security forces and is the single most militarized MOI agency. AlZayed was the head of the SSFC when its riot police led the most violent raid in Bahrain since the 1990s, attacking the peaceful protesters in Duraz in in May 2017, killing five

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<sup>1</sup> ADHRB, *Anatomy of a Police State* (Washington, DC: Americans for Democracy & Human Rights in Bahrain, 2019), <https://www.adhrb.org/2019/04/anatomy-of-a-police-state-systematic-repression-brutality-and-bahrains-ministry-of-interior/>.

protesters and wounding hundreds. His 2018 promotion to Deputy Chief of Public Security was a clear reward for his suppression of dissent and the appointment put him in a position to bring the SSFC's brutal policing tactics to the rest of the MOI.

*Ebrahim Habib AlGhaith*, Bahrain's Inspector General, is empowered to refer serious cases of misconduct to the MOI's Security Court system, however, the Security Courts have been restricted from hearing cases of "torture and inhuman or degrading treatment or deaths linked thereto" due to their apparent failure to impartially and transparently adjudicate cases of severe abuse. AlGhaith serves at the pleasure of the king and reports directly to the Interior Minister, undermining his independence from the ruling family and MOI. AlGhaith does not effectively carry out the office's mandate to investigate police misconduct.

*Abdulsalam Yousef AlOraifi* is the Director-General of the General Directorate of Reformation and Rehabilitation (GDRR). The GDRR maintains extremely poor living conditions in its detention centers and GDRR personnel or facilities are directly implicated in 62 percent of incidents of MOI abuse documented by ADHRB. GDRR authorities routinely deny detainees proper medical care; use torture as a form of control, punishment, and humiliation within the prison system; and are increasingly implicated in initial interrogations.

*Adnan Bahar* has been the acting head of Jau Prison since 2018. In 2008, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on torture documented severe cases of torture and sexual violence overseen by Bahar when he was still a sergeant. For example, Mohammed Abdullah AlSengais was handcuffed and dragged from his cell to the yard where he was beaten with an iron rod and sexually assaulted by two security agents in the presence of Bahar.

*Maryam Al-Bardouli* is the Isa Town Prison Commander and has reportedly assaulted political prisoners Hajer Mansoor, Medina Ali, and Najah Yusuf and allegedly said that she does not "care if people call me a torturer, but you must stop speaking out about what happens in the prison."

*Abdulaziz Mayoof AlRumaihi* has been Director-General of the General Directorate of Criminal Investigation and Forensic Science (GDCIFS) since July 2016. He was implicated in the February 2017 death of unarmed suspect Abdullah AlAjooz. AlAjooz died under suspicious circumstances as MOI police forces, under direction from the GDCIFS, attempted to arrest him from a home. AlAjooz's family and other observers believe that he was extrajudicially killed. The government has launched no independent investigation into AlAjooz's death. A year later AlRumaihi was promoted to brigadier.

*Mubarak bin Huwail AlMerri* oversaw the torture of at least six medical personnel that were arbitrarily detained in retaliation for treating wounded pro-democracy protesters in 2011 in his capacity as Director of Anti-Narcotics. Bahrain's Third Criminal Court acquitted AlMerri of all charges in 2013. In 2014, he was promoted to full colonel. That same year, three officials under his command tortured a prisoner to death in Jau Prison. In 2016, AlMerri was promoted to Director-General of Southern Governorate Police Directorate and later became Security Attaché at Bahrain's Embassy in Saudi Arabia.

*Bassam Mohammed AlMuraj* has been Director-General of the General Directorate of Anti-Corruption, Economic, and Electronic Security (GDAEES) since January 2013 and previously worked for the GDCIFS Criminal Investigation Directorate (CID). Multiple detainees have provided testimony naming AlMuraj as the lead supervisor of their torture sessions. AlMuraj has continued to torture dissidents since assuming control of the GDAEES. In 2013, MOI personnel arbitrarily arrested Hussain Hubail, an award-winning photojournalist, and AlMuraj personally oversaw his interrogation. AlMuraj threatened to rape him, his wife, and his mother, as well as to let him die in custody. *Fawaz AlSameem*, a GDAEES officer, reportedly beat and spat on Hubail under orders from AlMuraj. At least three other incidents of abuse that explicitly implicated AlSameem have been documented, all of which were reprisal attacks against activists for expressing peaceful criticism of the government.

*Abdullah Khalifa AlJairan* has been Director-General of the Northern Governorate Police since 2016, and as early as 2017, the king promoted him to brigadier despite the Northern

Governorate having some of Bahrain's highest rates of abuse. AlJairan oversaw almost all of the 11-month security operation to isolate and collectively punish the town of Duraz after thousands of Bahrainis launched a peaceful sit-in starting in June 2016. In 2017, authorities began launching violent raids on the sit-in, culminating in the 23 May raid that largely dispersed the assembly, leaving five protesters dead and hundreds injured. The MOI arrested 286 individuals, some of whom were later abused in custody. After the raid, AlJairan declared "things returned back to normal gradually in Duraz streets after the removal of roadblocks put by terrorist elements."

## **Conclusion and recommendations**

- Officials in Bahrain's MOI are able to commit severe abuses, often directed towards human rights activists and political opposition members, with impunity. The lack of accountability for these violations has allowed the MOI to become one of the most abusive agencies in Bahrain, and has resulted in the effective closure of civil and political space in the kingdom.
- In light of these abuses and the culture of impunity in Bahrain, ADHRB calls on the international community to:
- Impose sanctions on key individuals that have played a direct or supervisory role in human rights abuses, including the above-mentioned actors,
- Suspend all assistance to Bahrain's MOI until concrete reforms have been made to adhere to international human rights standards.

Further, ADHRB calls on the Government of Bahrain to:

- Reform the MOI and its disciplinary bodies to ensure full independence and successful execution of their mandates under international standards,
- Allow for independent investigations into allegations of torture and rights abuses and to hold the perpetrators of such rights violations accountable.