



# General Assembly

Distr.: General  
23 August 2019

English only

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## Human Rights Council

Forty-second session

9–27 September 2019

Agenda item 4

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.

[20 August 2019]

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



## **Bahrain and the alleged Al-Qaeda connection**

Americans for Democracy & Human Rights in Bahrain (ADHRB) welcomes this opportunity at the 42<sup>nd</sup> session of the United Nations (UN) Human Rights Council (HRC) to highlight recent allegations that authorities in Bahrain have used extremist and terrorist organizations to counter political opposition.

### **Use of extremist forces to eliminate the opposition**

The Al-Jazeera channel, based in Qatar, recently aired a documentary in both Arabic and English, entitled “Bahrain: Playing with Fire.” In the documentary, allegations surfaced suggesting that the Bahraini government made attempts to coerce current and former members of Al-Qaeda in Bahrain to target key Shia figures in the political opposition and pro-democracy movement. The individuals who appear in the documentary, Yasser Al-Jalameh, Mohammad Saleh, Hilal Albalushi, and Dr Salah Al Bandar, claim that the orders came directly from King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa of Bahrain, and in response to the mass protests in 2011.<sup>1</sup>

In a video recording, which he claimed he made in order to be used as evidence and to ensure his survival, Mohammad Saleh stated that he was approached by a state security officer on behalf of the king. He claimed that in this meeting he was given approval to cause discord in society by assassinating prominent Shia members. Saleh claimed that he was tasked with contacting Al-Qaeda members in Saudi Arabia to gain access to weapons. On his way to Saudi Arabia, he was arrested and imprisoned. During his detention he informed the Saudi authorities of Bahrain’s plan to use extremist forces to systematically target members of Bahrain’s Shia community. While in detention, Saleh claims that he was told that King Hamad had sent several delegations to call for his release, and that he was eventually freed and returned to Bahrain. Upon his return to Bahrain, Saleh claims that he met King Hamad in person, and that Hamad was happy to receive him, and he stated that Hamad was pleased to hear about his release. Saleh further claims that King Hamad said that he was a victim of injustice and that he would be compensated.<sup>2</sup>

In another video recording, Hisham Hilal Mohammad AlBalushi claims that Bahrain’s National Security Agency recruited him to spy in Iran. AlBalushi alleges that he was detained by Bahraini security services and threatened with imprisonment and told that he could face six months in jail under the country’s broad counter-terrorism laws. At the same time, his brother was being held for arms possession and AlBalushi claims that the authorities asked if he wanted him released. He seized the opportunity and was supposedly provided with a phone and some cash and tasked with infiltrating the Jundullah, a Sunni armed group in Iran, and finding out more about their future plans. He stated that he was also required to take photos of military installations in Iran like the Konarak military airport in Chabahar, the military Khash region where the Revolutionary Guards are based.<sup>3</sup> However, the Iranian authorities were monitoring his activities and he had to escape to Pakistan. He approached the Bahraini embassy in Pakistan and was told to handle this situation without aid from the state but was allegedly provided an envelope by security forces with \$32.00 USD. AlBalushi was a fugitive in Pakistan between 2008 and 2010. He eventually made his way to Bahrain and on landing was taken to the National Security Agency, where he said he was detained for four days and given a second envelope, containing \$1,300.00 USD. His video recording was released in 2011 and in 2013 he

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<sup>1</sup> “Bahrain: Playing with Fire,” Al Jazeera, 27 July 2019, <https://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/aljazeeraeworld/2019/07/bahrain-playing-fire-190727093038378.html>.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

appeared to be a leader of an armed group in Iran, Ansar Al-Furqan. By April 2015, according to Iranian authorities, he was killed by Iranian Special Forces in Southern Iran.<sup>4</sup>

The use of radical methods and actors to cause chaos in Bahraini society, especially between Shia and Sunni was also highlighted by Yasser Al-Jalameh. He was the military leader in charge of dispersing crowds from the Pearl Roundabout during the uprising in Bahrain in 2011. He claims that the information he and his battalions were provided with was greatly misleading. In particular, he was told that he and his men would be facing heavily armed individuals who would be using ambush tactics and bombs. Therefore, as the officer in charge, he decided that the best way to deal with such a crowd would be with sufficient firepower using military equipment like tanks and helicopters. However, when Al-Jalameh and his troops approached the demonstrators, the demonstrators dispersed upon seeing these weapons, while others joined other demonstrators near Salmaniya Hospital.<sup>5</sup> Al-Jalameh claims that no demonstrators fired weapons, and that the images of weapons taken from protesters that were circulated by the government were planted by security forces acting under royal orders. He states that he saw authorities plant the weapons, take photographs and videos and then remove them.

Dr. Salah Al Bandar, who was a Strategic Planning Advisor to the King of Bahrain between 2002 and 2006, was also interviewed in the documentary. He highlighted that Bahraini authorities are focused on controlling citizens and wrote a report about how the government could drive a wedge between different factions of the opposition. The Al Bandar report mentions that government officials in Bahrain have been working to create and foment sectarian strife, in an effort to marginalize Bahrain's Shia community, and to target opposition figures. In his interview, he stated that he believes that the Bahraini authorities wanted to create sectarian tension and to disturb the harmony between Sunni and Shia citizens in order to corner the citizens into choosing what would seem like the only practical option - the current system.

## Responses by Bahraini Government

The Office of the Royal Family, Ministry of Interior, and Ministry of Foreign Affairs have denied these allegations.

Bahrain's Foreign Minister, Khaled bin Ahmed, said that the documentary is full of "lies and fallacies against the state of Bahrain"<sup>6</sup> and described Qatar, where Al Jazeera is based, as "a rogue state which has become the biggest threat in the Gulf Cooperation Council."<sup>7</sup>

The Information Affairs Minister, Ali bin Mohammed Al-Rumaihi has also reacted to Al-Jazeera's information by saying that there were "attempts made by Al Jazeera channel to contact him and other officials, through unidentified telephone numbers, to record their conversations without their knowledge or official consent and to provoke them by using despicable methods."<sup>8</sup>

The state-run Bahrain News Agency reported that the information Saleh provided was false and was to "help international human rights groups build pressure on Bahrain's government and security agencies."<sup>9</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> "Al Jazeera Documentary Reflects Qatar Regime's Conspiracy Against Kingdom," The Daily Tribune: News of Bahrain, 16 July 2019, <https://www.newsofbahrain.com/bahrain/55552.html>.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> "Minister Slams Al Jazeera's Methods ; Insists on Riyadh Solution," Bahrain News Agency, 13 July 2019, <https://www.bna.bh/en/MinisterslamsAlJazeerasmethodsinsistsonRiyadholution.aspx?cms=q8FmFJgiscL2fwIzON1%2BDkDguM%2FuhTB9kPBwA%2F60XcA%3D>.

<sup>9</sup> "Qatar's Recordings A Combination of Lies, Fabrications to Conspire Against Bahrain," Bahrain News Agency, 17 July 2019, <https://www.bna.bh/en/news?cms=q8FmFJgiscL2fwIzON1%2BDs8oHbiaieVE5meqPLj6fQ%3D>.

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

As a member of the UN Human Rights Council, Bahrain must be held to higher standards when it comes to its commitment to human rights, including allowing its citizens to participate in peaceful demonstrations and exercising their right to the freedom of expression and opinion and assembly.

Allegations of the use of extremists to eliminate Shia political opposition leaders are deeply concerning, as are allegations that the government intentionally sought to inflame sectarian tensions. Despite the denial of any connection between King Hamad and Al-Qaeda, these claims and allegations must be investigated.

#### **ADHRB urges the Government of Bahrain to:**

- Release all credible information regarding the use of extremist forces to eliminate opposition groups in Bahrain;
  - Immediately stop all activities that isolate the Shia community;
  - Stop the harassment of peaceful protestors as they are exercising their right to freedom of expression and opinion, assembly and association;
  - Hold officials at Bahrain's Ministry of Interior accountable for human rights abuses committed under their watch; and
  - Release all political prisoners.
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