

# Bahrain Monitor

A Monthly Newsletter on the Human Rights Situation in Bahrain



*Bahrain Human Rights Monitor*

مرصد البحرين لحقوق الإنسان

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## Reforms in Bahrain and Foreign Pressure

It is difficult to discuss human rights and democratization in Bahrain, without taking into consideration the international and regional political climate. Admittedly, there are internal problems which impede reforms and also certain political movements which reject them completely or object to parts of them. Hence, the observer of the situation in Bahrain will also sense challenges of a different nature related to the influence of the external political situation.

It is possible to categorize the external pressures on the reform process in Bahrain into three challenges:

- This challenge relates to the legislation of laws and regulations, whereby some international powers put pressure on Bahrain to pass laws that concern, for example, combating terrorism. This may also result in breaching international human rights standards. Sometimes these powers also interfere in order to suppress certain political or religious groups which are perceived to be terrorists.
- Another challenge concerns regional pressure on the Bahraini democratization process. The reason for this is that the Bahraini experience was born in an immature regional environment; and perceived by some countries as a temptation for their own societies. This pressurizes these countries into improving their political situations. Unfortunately, instead of improving and reforming their political situation, some countries do the opposite by putting pressure on Bahrain to stop the political process or to slow it down.
- The third challenge relates to the tense political atmosphere in the region including the instability in Iraq, Iran's conflict with the super powers and the escalation in violence in more than one neighboring country. This tense atmosphere resulted in sharp polarization which affected the local situation in all countries including Bahrain, and also increased disregard for the reform agenda due to the mounting pressure from various parts of the conflict.

The reform experience in Bahrain is still new and external pressure is mounting. This resulted in obstructing and slowing down reforms and pushing towards violating international human rights standards.

It must be said that this pressure is not a plausible justification for adopting a policy that neglects citizens' rights. It is also an un-acceptable justification for slowing down the reform process.

The Government in Bahrain must not give in to foreign pressure or slow down the reform process. This is because the stability of the regime in Bahrain depends on the citizens' satisfaction, which is of the utmost importance. Foreign pressure, on the other hand, can be dealt with as long as public satisfaction and political wisdom, which is able to circumvent these pressures, exist.

Hasan Moosa Shafaei

President - Bahrain Human Rights Monitor

### Protests by Unemployed Graduates

In their quest for work, the unemployed graduates of the social sciences departments protested eight times during the last three months outside the building of the Ministry of Education ( the last three took place on: 27 July 2009, 3 and 17 August 2009 respectively). The representative



of the Social Science Society said that 'it is shameful that the graduates are standing under the heat of the sun demanding their right to work, which is guaranteed by the Constitution and the Charter'.

The Minister of Labour admitted that unemployment among graduates has increased in recent years. On the other hand, the House of Representatives has proposed a bill to employ more social workers in schools and universities. But the Education Ministry had reservations for budget-

connected reasons.

In order to solve the problem, the Government has established a committee, which developed a plan. The plan has been approved by the Economic Development Council. The plan is aiming to allocate 24 million Dinars (US\$ 63 million) and is expected to be implemented in October 2009.

### UNDP: Arab Development Report, 2009

On 25 August 2009, a seminar was held at the H.Q. of U.N. in Manama, Bahrain to discuss the latest report released by the UNDP on Arab Human Development, 2009. The theme of the report this time is: 'Challenges to Human Security in the Arab Countries'. Sayed Agha (UNDP Permanent Representative in Bahrain) pointed out the level of health services in Bahrain and the need to pay more attention to the environment, youth and women.

Mohamed Al Sharif (UNDP Assistant Resident Representative

in Bahrain), said that all indicators show that, concerning political action, Bahrain is advanced. However, other problems exist relating to water due to desertification and the increase in the level of sea water. The Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, Dr. Nazar



Al Baharna, expressed his appreciation of the report and said that, currently, the focus in Bahrain is on three issues: knowledge, freedom and empowerment of women; adding that Bahrain has considered all of these issues by reforming education and spreading human rights culture and knowledge.

### Report of the Ibn Khaldon Centre

Ibn Khaldon Centre issued its annual report in August 2009 regarding the civil society and democratization in the Arab world. Most of the local newspapers did not comment on the report, perhaps because it was not precise in its information or unbalanced in its analysis and findings. For example, the report states that: 'admittedly, a real democracy does not exist in Bahrain, for there are no competing political parties, no elected legislative authority, independent judiciary or true separation of powers'.

Despite the fact that a fully democratic system does not exist in Bahrain, there are political parties, an elected legislative authority, general satisfaction with the judiciary and real initiatives to promote its independence. However, Bahrain needs to exert more effort in the democratization process.

The report also called on the

### International Praise for the Royal Pardon

The King of Bahrain received a letter from the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Navanethem Pillay, in which she expressed her appreciation of the royal pardon which was issued on the 11th of April 2009 regarding some individuals accused of security breaches. She stated that the pardon is an indicator of Bahrain's continued efforts to fulfill its commitments within the frame-work of the reform program and through cooperation and dialogue. Pillay considered the royal pardon as an important step towards fulfilling Bahrain's human rights commitments which was announced

in the periodic review in 2008.

The Secretary General of Bahrain Human Rights Society, Abdullaah Al Drazi, said that the royal pardon is welcomed by local, regional and international organizations, stating: 'we hope that the pardon includes the detainees in both the Karazkan and Al Ma'meer cases, as these two cases have been delayed'.



Government to regard the opposition as a partner in solving Bahrain's problems and not a factor threatening the unity of the country.

The report also considered that 'It is important that the Parliament carry out its duty in solving the country's problems, instead of rushing towards gaining sectarian favoritism'.

## Social Development Ministry: Control of NGOs

The Director of civil society organizations in the Ministry of Social Development, Najwa Janahi, stressed the fact that the Ministry would file a law suit against any civil organization that does not cooperate with the Ministry to correct its legal status. Janahi also said that some of these organizations have cooperated greatly, but there are also some who have refused to cooperate despite the large amount of amicable

solutions presented by the Ministry. Janahi stated in Al-Bilad newspaper (11 August 2009), that the Ministry is regularly monitoring the centers and societies. It was clear to the Ministry that many societies were sincere about restoring their status. Also, some societies and charities have proposed amendments to their statutes so that they are able to work within the law. Finally, Janahi affirmed that 'the aim of the Ministry is to make sure that everyone works within the law, we also do not want to control any society that complies with the law.'



## Local Report on Women's Prison

On 20 August 2009, the Bahrain

Human Rights Society issued its report regarding its visit to the women's prison last May after delivering a copy of the report to the Bahraini Interior Minister. The latter stressed, during his meeting with the Secretary General of the Society, Abdulla Al Drazi, that his Ministry adheres to the principles of democracy and humanity when dealing with citizens. He also affirmed that public freedom is a necessity as well as the implementation of international standards as stated in international treaties and conventions. The Minister promised that the report will be studied and that its recommendations will be taken into consideration. Moreover, he stressed the importance of continuing cooperation with the Society and praised and valued its efforts.

In addition to the above, Drazi said that 'the aim of the report is not to look for faults and shortcomings, but to present recommendations to the authority in order to develop these centers and consider the human rights aspects in compliance with international agreements.'

Among the recommendations is to establish a new building; train inmates on suitable skills; help fulfill the needs of non-Bahraini inmates; reconsider the deportation of some inmates whose families still live in Bahrain; issue a new law for rehabilitation centers; implement alternative punishments for minor offences; introduce educational programs; care for the psychological well fair of the inmates; urge embassies to care for their imprisoned citizens; increase recreation activity; form a committee for human rights; and allow local and international organizations regular visits to the detention centers.



## Foreign Workers Can Now Choose

Since the 1st of August 2009 foreign workers have stopped working with their current employers and have moved to work with different employers in different institutions. The abolition of the guarantor system has allowed workers to move freely between jobs. This has occurred despite the fact that many employers have objected to the new system as it causes disorder when attempting to replace the workers and also generates extra expenses.

A number of merchants closed their shops as a protest against the decision. The committee which consists of the (Ministry of Labour, Labour Market Regulatory Authority, Bahrain Chamber of Commerce and Industry and General Federation of Bahrain Trade Unions), has failed

to find a solution to the problem created by the implementation of the decision, which states that 'the foreign worker has the right to move



to another job without the permission of his employer as long as the rights of the latter are not affected'.

The Minister of Labour described the guarantor system as 'uncivilized' and that the 'freedom of changing jobs' complies with international regulations. He also stated that abolishing the guarantor system will place Bahrain among developed countries in their attitudes towards foreign workers.

## Challenges Facing Civil Society Organizations in Bahrain: **Lack of Voluntary Sprit and Funding**

Hasan Moosa Shafaei

**Before the reform period, the main complaint focused on the society's inability to express its hopes as well the lack of channels in which the public could participate in the building of their desired society. The complaints also centered on the lack of opportunities to establish civil society organizations (CSOs), as the authority at that time was considered oppressive and did not want such organizations to be established or work outside its control. Or else it may have wanted to establish some organizations, but under its own umbrella in order to serve its own purpose and agenda.**

When the reform project began, the public started joining political and human rights societies, charity funds, committees, clubs, unions and various kinds of societies. These organizations covered most of the issues that concerned citizens and included all social segments such as women, youth, handicapped, children, foreign workers, unemployed and elderly etc.

The establishment of such societies, unions, committees and clubs no longer poses a problem. It has become very easy for any group to be registered in the Ministry of Social Development. The political authority- at the beginning of the reform period- was excited as well about the establishment of CSOs and, in fact, pushed towards the establishment of more, made the procedures easy and even turned a blind eye to some shortcomings. What matters for the Government is that society is moving and becomes publicly active, but within clear and defined laws and regulations.

During the last years nearly 450 CSOs were established. However, it appears now that these CSOs face new challenges within the socio-political environment under which they operate. Because such challenges are numerous, only two challenges will be discussed based on the present experience:

### **1- The absence of voluntary spirit**

Essentially, CSOs are voluntary in nature, as they are formed independently by some members of the society and depend upon its human and financial resources. The number of volunteers and donors increases with how active

the society is. And sometimes the scope of interest for CSOs also widens to include unimaginable subjects. However, when the spirit of volunteering weakens, these CSOs become weak also and deteriorate to the extent that they are unable to perform their tasks, and could also fail to accomplish what they were eager to carry out.

We witnessed an explosion in the establishment of CSOs at the beginning of the reform period. This reveals that the elite in society were aware of the importance of these organizations and their role, which led them to hasten towards forming them, followed by a large number of people who rushed to show their support and registered their names as members with some help, encouragement and financial support from the Government.

But today and after many years of civil work, it is noticeable that a large number of these CSOs are going through an inactive phase, and are unable to accomplish anything. Some have even been reduced to mere names on a piece of paper with no activity whatsoever. What has happened? And why? Was the initial eagerness merely an emotional outburst resulting from years of deprivation and oppression, which quickly subsided after officially registering these organizations?

Most CSOs are complaining of a lack of volunteers and donors, which has affected their performance. If a society neglects its CSOs, the latter will become isolated and helpless due to the lack of human and financial resources. Perhaps this is what is happening now.

The question is: why the spirit of volunteering declined in society? Does the problem lie in the CSOs' failure to convince people of their message? Or perhaps Bahraini society is new to this experience and is now preoccupied with other worries? Or perhaps there is a lack of understanding of CSOs' role. It is as though there are intellectuals who are fully aware of their role, but cannot find workers from the masses to implement their ideas.

It is noticeable that some sectors of society do not offer any kind of help to CSOs, but at the same time have high expectations in them, which exceed the CSOs' capacity. Perhaps we should mention here the fact that some individuals do not even differentiate between the specialties of the various societies. For example, they might even demand a solution for the unemployment crisis from a human rights society! Or ask for financial support from one that is itself in need of money.

Moreover, CSOs, in general, depend on a small number of fully devoted individuals and the rest of the work is performed by volunteers. In Bahrain, there are shortages in both. There is a lack of fully devoted individuals due to limited resources, and hence people work only during their spare time. And in addition to this, the number of volunteers is also insufficient, so how can such organizations produce, develop themselves and have an impact on society?

### **2-Lack of adequate funding**

There are two sources of funding:

the membership subscription fees of the locals and limited governmental funding. The lack of adequate funding for many societies (including those with prestigious positions such as the Transparency Society which is a member of Transparency International) is such that they are unable to rent out offices or employ a few professional staff, let alone fund their activities, publish their publications and cover travel and accommodation expenses.

Currently, many CSOs are in a very difficult position. The Government says that it supports these institutions, and the society, from its part, expects tangible services. But how is this possible when the laws governing these CSOs forbid receiving any 'foreign funding' even from similar organizations abroad?

We believe that the Government bears a big part of the responsibility for the weakness of CSOs because what they have allocated so far for funding CSOs is insufficient. And if the Government believes in the necessity of making the experience of these organizations successful - in a society that is new to the democratic experience - it should recognize the difficulties facing these institutions as many of them are inactive due to financial problems.

And thus, the least the Government can do is to provide either permanent or rented offices to these organizations, as well as bearing some of the expenses so that skilled staff can be hired, and professionalism and the ability to interact with society can be developed.

It is shameful, for instance, that the Bahraini Women's Union, which is an umbrella for tens of various women societies, is threatened, at present, to be evicted from its office because the Government had refused to pay the rent. Can such a policy improve the experience of Bahraini CSOs?

If sufficient funding is not provided locally by the public and Government, the organizations should not be blamed if they turn to foreign aid. Also, if the Government decides to increase its funding to these organizations, this should be done free from any political bias.

## News in Brief

- A number of activists in women's societies demanded the implementation of the quota electoral system in order to facilitate women's access to Parliament in the next election. However, some female MPs rejected this saying that the system contains a constitutional violation.
- The President of Bahrain Human Rights Society, Dr. Abdullah Al Drazi, said that the Society will begin its preparations for the upcoming elections in 2010, pointing to the formation of a joint committee with Bahrain Transparency Society.
- On 18 August 2009, the relatives of the detainee in Saudi Arabia, Abdulraheem Al-Murbaty, staged a protest opposite the Saudi Embassy in Manama. The Government said that the protest is illegal, while the protestors claimed that their number did not exceed 5 individuals, and hence, the matter did not require permission from the authority.
- On 26 August 2009, the Bahraini Minister of Foreign Affairs met the President of Bahrain Transparency Society and praised the Society's activities. He also stressed the importance of communicating and coordinating with it in order to promote democracy in Bahrain.
- Bahraini Government has rejected a proposal by Parliament to increase financial help to the disabled, and said that the current social security law is adequate to fulfill the need of this particular social group, adding that supporting the disabled is not limited to providing financial support.
- A researcher in the Attagdeed Cultural Society (Cultural Renewal Society), Ms. Rabiha Alzeera, as well as twenty other women, participated last August in a periodic meeting in Malaysia to discuss human rights. The meeting was entitled 'Understanding Islam from a Human Rights Perspective'. The conference aimed to throw the light on justice and equality in the Muslim family.
- MP Abdulhussain Al-Motghawee, said that the Al-Wefaq block will propose a bill regarding justice for victims of torture. He also expressed his hope that the electoral constituencies will be amended.
- On 7 August 2009, tens of citizens participated in a peaceful protest demanding the release of some detainees arrested following the killing of a member of the police force during a violent riot. A different protest took place on 9 August 2009, when the families of some detainees from Al-Ma'ameer village, who were accused of killing an Asian worker, demanded their immediate release.
- An official report shows that the unemployment rate has reached 3.8% last July, and that the number of the unemployed has reached 5566 individuals.

## Bahrain: Inciting Violence and its Impacts on Human Rights Violations

Bahrain remains trapped in a circle of violence and riots, to the extent that incidents of violence are now occurring on an almost weekly basis. This includes streets being blocked with burning tires and rubbish bins, clashes with the security forces, the use of fire bombs and vandalizing public properties such as electric generators and street lamps.

At the beginning of the New Year, the political situation escalated and police cars were attacked with Molotov bombs which resulted in a number of human casualties, including the burning to death of a policeman in Karazcan and a foreign worker in Al Ma'ameer. A substantial number of citizens and residents were also wounded and burned, and some even lost their sight (publicly known as the Beni Jammrah incident).

Regardless of the reasons behind the current political and social violence, these incidents are generally unjustifiable and unacceptable, especially in a country that has an open political atmosphere and a political process in which the vast majority of the people are participating. This article discusses inciting violence which many political parties and human rights activists are believed to be involved in. An example of this is the speech of Abdulhadi Al Khawaja, former president of Bahrain Human Rights Centre, on the occasion of Ashura in January 2009.

This kind of incitement has mostly been imported, and is not only responsible for political and security tensions in the country, but most importantly, is also responsible for the human rights

violations that have occurred. This is because it provides a suitable environment for breeding violence and is one of the main obstacles facing the natural development of civil human rights institutions. It is notable that some extremely politicized parties and individuals have established offices under the pretext of defending human rights, but at the same time use a purely political rhetoric. It is also clear that political incitement has attracted local human rights institutions in a strange kind of alliance, as it is unusual for advocates of violence to form alliances with human rights defenders, who should defend the principles of justice.

The objectives and the language used for inciting violence will be addressed here. Although it is not possible to go into the details, it is sufficient to point out some of the main points based on the example of one particular public statement. This statement, which contains subversive and violent content, was issued by the London-based Bahrain Freedom Movement (Harakat Ahrar al-Bahrain) under the title 'Thank You: Youth of Molotov'. The statement was issued on 12 April 2009, after the royal pardon of 178 detainees involved in clashes and riots. Generally, the title is stunning and self explanatory. However, we have the following remarks about the statement:

1) The incitement is directed at the youth in particular, as they are adventurous and less mature. The statement praises them as follows: 'you are a source of pride, dignity and freedom. You have taught us many lessons and proved that the

regime is as weak as a spider's web...you are heroes etc'. As much as these youths are exploited as tools of the incitement, they are also its victims.

2) The statement contains a truly ugly description of the enemy, whether a ruler or a competing body. Descriptions of the enemy that contained in the statement include: 'cruel', 'corrupt', 'torturers, killers, invaders, occupiers, tyrants'. Such a description renders confronting the enemy not only desirable, but also a duty, as those who embody these attributes should undoubtedly be opposed despite all difficulties. The statement promises people that victory can be achieved by removing the regime: 'your heroism has broken the enemy and a dedicated few are able to weaken the regime and overturn it'. The



*The jeep in which the security man burned to death*

statement continued: 'those who perpetrate crimes against humanity, especially the main tyrant and his ministers and torturers' have been exposed 'and you have paved the way for international trials of the regime, just like the Nazis after World War Two. The Nuremburg trials will be repeated with the help of Allah'.

3) The incitement in the statement is direct; otherwise it would lose its effect on the youth. The amount of verbal incitement and praise for violence is shocking such as:

'thank you to the youth of cylinders and burning tires ... without you, newspapers and news agencies would not have been alerted to the injustice facing our people. Never give in to the enemies of Allah, the people and humanity. We are now more determined to confront injustice, oppressors, occupiers and occupation'. The statement went on to tell the youth (to prepare for a more decisive confrontation.. and that your choice to take to the streets is what broke the enemy's backbone , and that the correct attitude [towards the rulers] is to smack their mouths, and spit in their faces)!

4) Advocates of violence fear that they will be accused of incitement, which is why we find in the statement references to 'the peaceful movement' as though all that is being said can be justified as freedom of speech and thus does not contradict human rights standards and charters: 'thank you to the youth of cylinders and burning tires for your commitment to the peaceful movement which has amazed the whole world'. The objective of those inciting violence is to convince these youths that their behaviour is acceptable and legitimate in the eyes of the world with the exception of the Government of Bahrain 'thank you for refusing to abandon the use of peaceful means of pressurizing.'

5) The incitement discourse sees violence and riots as a 'useful means' of confronting the Government. The regime is viewed as an 'occupier' and hence it should be confronted with violence, declaring war and deportation from the country. Violence is perceived by the Freeman of Bahrain Movement as the only means available to the youth to change the reality of the situation. Moreover, this rhetoric

incites against those who object to the use of violence and riots and even against the mediators who are perceived by the statement to be the puppets of the regime: 'you have not been put down by the so called 'societal' committees which aim to protect the regime by silencing you, even if this requires the issuing of a religious decree'.

6) This rhetoric also depends on religious language in legitimizing itself and the activity of those responsible of it, not only against the Government, but also against politicians and human rights activists who oppose them. Verses from the holy Koran and religious vocabulary are used for example, as the regime is said to target 'religion, social values and the country's culture'; those practicing violence are freedom fighters, sacrificing themselves for the sake of Allah by confronting the pharaoh and their actions will earn them rewards in the Day of Judgment.

All statements and speeches similar to this one, be they from political or human rights bodies, represent a clear violation of human rights standards and the principles of justice. This is because they encourage, legitimize and blatantly justify the use of violence. They also contain unacceptable attacks on the

rights of others, regardless of their identity, which includes insulting and defaming.

The responsibility of human rights activists in Bahrain is to refrain from this kind of rhetoric which is contrary to the spirit of justice, and to condemn it and all those involved in it. However, this does not deny the fact that human rights activists should monitor the course of justice with regards to those detained on rioting and violence charges; especially as there are currently



**Riots and Violence: Attack on the Rights of Others**

individuals imprisoned for the killing of a policeman and a foreign worker and are still awaiting trial. Regardless of their accusations, it is necessary to implement fair trial standards in these cases including examining the evidence, providing lawyers, public trials etc.

# My Presidency of the National Human Rights Commission is a mere Rumour Shafaei: I'm Against Using Human Rights as a Means of Obtaining a Parliamentary Position

In an interview with Al-Bilad Bahraini newspaper on 25 August 2009, the President of the Bahrain Human Rights Monitor (BHRM), Hasan Moosa Shafaei denied being nominated to become the president of or a member in the National Commission for Human Rights. Currently, the formation of such a commission is being discussed by the decision-makers. Mr. Shafaei answered a number of questions regarding the human rights situation in Bahrain as follows:

**Why does the BHRM conduct its work in London instead of Manama, especially as Bahrain is a promising environment for civil society activities and enjoys a wide margin of freedom in this respect?**

Undoubtedly, Bahrain as you have just mentioned is a suitable environment for civil society institutions and there are big opportunities for human rights activities. And currently, many local and international human rights organizations have benefited from this. I'm sure that you are up-to-date with the various activities of the international human rights organizations in Bahrain; and aware of the presence of several offices belonging to these organizations which are very active in the human rights field. And although the environment in Bahrain has drawn the attention of many activists in the world to the opportunities available there, the establishment of the BHRM in London has nothing to do with the freedom available. Rather, it is to do with the personal circumstances of those responsible for it, as they reside in London; as well as my personal situation. However, it is noteworthy that Bahrain like any other countries is exposed at the present time due to the advances in communication and hence everything that happens is known to all. Moreover, we do not have any problem in accessing information or keeping in touch with local human rights activists.

I believe that the BHRM being in London gives us a bigger opportunity to communicate directly with international organizations. There are also many human rights organizations already working and developing themselves in Bahrain. Our colleagues can learn from our work and we also can learn from theirs. Additionally, we have received a positive response especially from the Bahrain Society for Human Rights.

Actually, working away from Bahrain is an advantage as it allows us to monitor from a better position and most importantly this keeps us away from political and social problems or being affected by the local atmosphere. Being away makes us see matters from a different perspective and allows us to provide evaluations and opinions regarding various issues away from social and political disputes, as these narrow the scope of thinking and activity.

**Some accuse the BHRM of only revolving around yourself, what do you think of this?**

The BHRM is a new institution that depends on my effort and the efforts of a number of assistants and hence is not the product of a single effort. To tell you the truth, the fact that the BHRM depends on the efforts of a few individuals is not a negative aspect. We are not a political party aiming to

spread and expand and the BHRM, as well as other local and international human rights institutions, should not be judged according to the number of their employees but according to their achievements and the level of influence that they have on the ground. We are satisfied with our work and impact in this field and hope that it will grow to serve the human rights situation in Bahrain. In the end, we are concerned about the end result and not the number of employees.

**There are some rumours that you have been nominated to become the president or a member of the National Human Rights Commission in Bahrain, is this true? Have you been offered this?**

Most of what has been said are rumours. The establishment of the National Commission is important to us. And what concerns us even more is that the Commission creates a radical change in the situation of human rights. This is what is important, anything else is a detail. I believe that in Bahrain there are many competent individuals who can take on this position. Such matters should not be the responsibility of a specific individual.

**What is the BHRM's plan regarding the expected council and parliamentary elections? Is the BHRM going to send a team in order to supervise the election process?**

As of yet, this issue has not been discussed and if there is any effort to supervise the elections, it will be conducted in coordination with experienced local human rights organizations concerned with this matter. I'm specifically referring to



the Transparency Society which has supervised local and legislative elections in more than one Arab country, and as far as I know, the colleagues in the Transparency Society are preparing themselves for the upcoming elections. As for our role it will be providing guidance through suggestions and participating in some activities. But as I mentioned, it will most likely be with the cooperation of local organizations which are more competent at doing this work.

**What kind of response has the Bahrain BHRM newsletter received?**

The response to the monthly Arabic and English newsletters has been very positive, and has exceeded our expectations. We all know that there is a lack of understanding in the human

this information. We have tried as much as we can to open the eyes of our colleagues in Bahrain and abroad to the strategic contexts in which we analyze issues and also attempt to draw their attention to the defects with some criticism and corrections. We believe that we have provided something positive and have agreed on a frame work for analyzing the information relating to human rights in Bahrain. We want to improve ourselves and focus on the big issues that affect the general situation of human rights.

**What is your assessment of the activity and performance of Bahraini human rights organizations?**

I am not in a position to assess my colleague's activities as we ourselves in the BHRM need to be evaluated,

as well as our own, and could need some time to assess ourselves as I think that every human rights institution needs to assess itself before anybody else does.

According to my general assessment, human rights awareness, professionalism and expertise is increasing and this satisfies me at the present moment. When we, in the BHRM, talk and write about the shortcomings of human rights institutions, we are not excluding ourselves and most of the time we point to general issues without going into details, because it does not help much. I hope that local human rights institutions after years of work have learned from past experiences - good and bad.

**Do you expect that human rights activists can win seats in the House of Representatives?**

Firstly, I do not support mixing human rights with politics, or using human rights work in order to obtain a position in the House of Representatives. However, this does not mean that I personally do not want human rights activists in the Parliament. All that I want to say is that when a human rights activist is working in a human rights institution, I hope that his work is not polluted 'a lot' by politics. This is because the connection and influence between the two fields is unquestionable. Hence, when an activist decides to become part of a political electoral campaign in order to become a member of parliament, this is his right, however he should consider his organization's position and make sure that he does not politicize his organization or use it to secure a place in Parliament by involving it in political debates or existing political movements. And when an activist does become an MP I believe that he should sever his connection with his organization and work solely within parliament committees and not use his influence in the organization in political battles in order to strengthen his position and points of views.



rights situation in Bahrain, and we have worked to place matters in their political and human rights context which gives the Newsletter an important and unique position among human rights activists. We do not suffer from a shortage in information whether in Bahrain or abroad, but the problem lies in analyzing

guided and corrected. We should not forget that human rights activism and human rights institutions in Bahrain are quite new and we all do not claim to be perfect. But rather, we are honest with ourselves and strive to improve our human rights situation. We are still learning from the experiences of others,

## The Need to Fight Corruption

Nothing destroys a country and shortens its life span like corruption. It is a monster that destroys everything around it and even those who benefit from it. The problem is not in the very existence of corruption, which is impossible to eradicate. It must be said that it is difficult to find a country that is free of corruption. Therefore, the real problem lies in the size of corruption and the ability to contain it. What we referring to here is the containment of corruption within possible limits, so that it cannot spread like cancer and destroy both society and state.

Corruption is the opposite of righteousness and reform. Because we desire comprehensive reform in Bahrain, we should without any doubt address this subject. The issue is more complicated than just financial corruption, as it transcends all aspects of life to include political, cultural, judicial, media and administrative areas etc.

Although societies tend to stereotype and associate corruption mainly with financial issues, it is impossible to confine it to one area only. Like cancer, corruption spreads to surrounding areas and affects government apparatus, ordinary individuals and institutions. This eventually leads to corrupt the judiciary, security, culture and even the conscience and minds of ordinary people.

Corruption is a danger that threatens communities by destroying its resources, so that governments will not be able to meet the requirements and basic needs of its people. Due to this, corruption incites hatred towards the political

system and officials and might cause a system to collapse by losing its legitimacy and this will eventually encourage citizens to confront the system and attempt to topple it. At the least, corruption creates political and security tensions as is the case in many countries.

Part of the nature of corruption is that it produces a culture that supports it. For instance, we find that there are many individuals who are quick to criticize corruption when, in reality, they are involved in it or justify it. For instance, some justify the existence of corrupt officials arguing that if they were to be changed, more corrupt individuals, who are hungrier than their predecessors for wealth and power, would replace them. Some even believe that officials are not corrupt when they exploit public money, as

due to the lack of transparency. Corruption is also widely discussed by officials and citizens who have pointed to some of its forms. It is necessary to understand the exact size of this problem, discuss its causes, bring the corrupt to justice and provide all information relating to this issue. We believe that corruption in Bahrain is still controllable; however, it is spreading which endangers the reform project, makes government apparatuses ineffective, and distorts national spirit.

Undoubtedly, combating corruption is a priority and it is obvious that the sources of corruption are connected to wealth and power, and whose decisions have a great impact on society and the state itself. What we truly need is not merely a moral and religious deterrent as the temptation of power and wealth is far greater.

Additionally, there is also need for the following:

- A strict law, and also committees, for combating corruption, far from the influence of corrupt individuals, otherwise these committees will also be corrupted. The problem is not whether a law exists or not, despite its importance, but lies in its firm implementation by political leadership, and the existence of a firm and independent judiciary.
- Social supervision through media and legislatives.
- A national culture that views corruption as strange, harmful and dangerous to replace the existing culture that ignores the exploitation of public money. Frankly, there is need to take a tough stance against this monster before corruption becomes uncontrollable.



this money essentially belongs to them and, hence, they have the right to do with it as they wish! Corruption also reduces the individual's sense of humanity and patriotism for his/her country as well as reduces their national pride. When corruption is accepted as a norm in a society, the irony is that 'corrupt persons' are perceived as 'clever persons' while 'honest persons' are perceived as 'stupid persons'.

Corruption exists in Bahrain as in any other country in the world. However, we do not know its scale

## Bahrain Human Rights Society Released its Report on the Women's Prison

The Bahrain Human Rights Society launched its second report on 20 May 2009 about prison conditions in Bahrain. The report was prepared after a visit by the Society on 9 May 2009 to the (Centre of reform and rehabilitation for women - women's prison) where a third of the inmates were met. The Society launched the first reports on the (Reform and Rehabilitation Centre in Jaw - the men's prison) in December 2006.

The current report provides analysis of laws relating to prisons and the services provided at the women's prison. It also highlights the views of the inmates about the situation within the prison, and compared it with the Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners. The report concluded with comprehensive recommendations. Despite the relative improvement in the conditions of inmates, but the report pointed to some limited violations in the prison, including: non-separation of inmates tried for civil suits from those convicted of criminal offenses; the absence of a permanent nurse and the lack of regular visits by doctors to check inmates and to ensure their physical and mental health; the lack of an interpreter to facilitate dealing with non-Bahraini inmates; the lack of programs to rehabilitate inmates; no separation of different categories of inmates, which constitutes a danger to the young; placing more than one inmate in one cell with up to ten inmates in one cell in some cases; the absence of attached bathrooms in the cells except those allocated for women with children and patients with infectious diseases. Some of the positive aspects mentioned in the report include: management of the prison never uses handcuff on inmates; and good treatment received by inmates from the prison staff; and reasonable hygienic cells.

The report contained 20

recommendations including: establishing a new prison for women; training of inmates to qualify for life after imprisonment; reviewing the decision to deport some girls who have families in Bahrain; enacting a new law for reform and rehabilitation instead of the current law; applying alternative penalties for minor offenses; introducing educational programs to combat literacy and teach Arabic or English; addressing the mental health of inmates; establishing a library equipped with books and journals in different languages; carrying out medical and psychiatric examination on inmates before admission to the prison and after release; having a resident nurse; educating inmates about their rights and providing leaflets in different languages; increasing recreational and educational activities; forming a national human rights commission, whose functions include the receipt of complaints and inspection of prisons on a regular and sudden basis; allowing civil society organizations and international organizations to carry out regular visits at any time and without prior notice to places of detention and imprisonment; accession to the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture to prevent torture in places of detention; activation of bilateral agreements between Bahrain and other countries for the transfer of foreign women prisoners to their countries; ratification of the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children.

It is noted that a number of inmates were detained because of violations of immigration laws, including non-renewal of residence. Such cases can be tackled through the imposition of fines and coordination with the relevant embassies. It was also noted that a large portion of inmates are migrant

workers, which requires coordination between the Ministries of Interior and Labour to put strict conditions during recruitment including a pledge not to engage in criminal practices such as prostitution and organized crime. Violation of this pledge should result in a fine and/or immediate deportation, taking into account the family situation.

In terms of methodology, it could have been more useful if the prison visit lasted for more than one day because of the importance of the issue. Additionally, the portion of inmates met represents only 31% of the overall total and this does not reflect the situation of the inmates as a whole. For a comprehensive analysis, it is hoped that future reports on prisons would cover more than half of the inmates. It is also important to address the right of married female prisoners to marital cohabitation

The recommendations contained in the report need cooperation of several entities to put into effect. In addition to the Ministry of Interior, stakeholders include the legislature to enact new laws on prisons, which take into account Bahrain's international obligations in the treatment of prisoners and detainees. The Ministry of Finance should also be involved in order to prioritize allocation of budget for prisons. The academics should be involved at the university level, especially departments of law and psychology, to conduct researches aiming at assessing the effects of detention and imprisonment on inmates' lives and the lives of their families. Such researches will help in developing a curriculum suitable for the development of prisoners. There is need to establish a committee to consider the situation of prisons and alternative penalties to imprisonment such as community services, which applied in many other disciplines, especially (63.16% of the inmates are young and did not reach the age of 35), according to the report.

The Report is available only in Arabic through the following link: [http://www.bhrs.org/uploadedfiles/women\\_prision\\_report\\_visit.pdf](http://www.bhrs.org/uploadedfiles/women_prision_report_visit.pdf)

## Activities of the President of the BHRM in Bahrain

The President of the Bahrain Human Rights Monitor (BHRM), Hasan Shafaei, visited Bahrain on 15-27 August 2009. The objective of the visit was to have a close look at the human rights situation and also meet the heads of a number of civil society organizations (CSOs), political activists, officials, media people, research and studies centers and a number of academics.

Mr. Shafaei discussed the political and human rights situation in Bahrain, the scope of cooperation and suggestions regarding the development of human rights in the country. He also received assessments of the current political process and its impact on the human rights situation as well as the challenges facing CSOs.

Mr. Shafaei presented a detailed description of the BHRM, its current activities, publications, future plans and also discussed mutual cooperation. The meetings culminated in agreement with a number of CSOs to carry out a number of activities at the national and international level, which promote and enhance the human rights situation in Bahrain.

Additionally, Mr. Shafaei met representatives of some political societies, i.e. political parties, including Sheikh Ali Salman, MP and Secretary General of Wefaq ; Dr. Hassan Madan, Secretary

General of the Progressive Democratic Forum; and Abdulnabi Al Ekri from the Democratic Action Society.

Moreover, a meeting took place with Sayyed Agha (UNDP Permanent Representative in Bahrain) () and his assistant, Mohamed Al- Sharif in the former's office. Mr. Shafaei also visited the Bahrain Centre for Studies and Research and met its Security General, Dr. Abdulla Al Sadiq, and Dr. M. Galal- an international strategic studies advisor -as well as Hussamuddin Salem, Editor of the Strategic Studies Journal.

Among others who were visited by Mr. Shafaei included: Dr Baquer Al- Najjar- a Professor of Sociology at Bahrain University; Jameela Salman, Head of Bahrain Bar Society; Mariam Al-Rowaie, President of Bahrain Women's Union; and Dr. Abdulla Al Drazi, Secretary General of Bahrain Human Rights Society. Mr. Shafaei also met the board members of the Bahrain Transparency Society including Abdulnabi Al Ekri, President of the Society and Vice-President Yousif Zainal. In addition to this, meetings also took place with the Editor-in- Chief of Al-Ayam newspaper, Isa Al-Shajji; Saeed Alhamad, Editor-in- Chief of Al-Bilad newspaper; Moanes Al Mardi, the Editor-in- Chief of Al-Waqt newspaper; Ibrahim Bashmi , Editor-in- Chief of Al-Watan newspaper Abdulla Salman.



**With Saeed Al Hamad  
(Alayam newspaper)**



**With Dr Hassn Madan  
(The Progressive Democratic Forum)**



**With Sheikh Ali SALman (Al Wefaq)**



**With both Mr. Al Ekri and Mr. Al Drazi**



**In Bahrain Centre for Research  
and Studies**



**With Jameela Salman  
(Bahrain Bar Society)**



**With Maryam Al Rowaiee (women union)**



**With the Editor-in- chief- of Al Watan  
newspaper and journalists**



**With the Editor- in- Chief of Al-Waqt  
newspaper and his Deputy**



**With Mr. Sayyed Agha (UNDP)**