

Bahrain Monitor

A Monthly Newsletter on the Human Rights Situation in Bahrain



Bahrain Human Rights Monitor

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Pillars of Stability

Security situation in Bahrain is calm following the disappearance of street violence. Council and Parliamentary elections also took place on time in accordance with legal procedures and international standards. Clearly, security has been reinforced, but as in other countries Bahrain must now exert long term efforts to strengthen the foundations of stability. These can be summarised as follows:

Firstly: Expansion of democracy and public participation in decision-making. The mere election of representatives in Parliament does not constitute real or equal participation in decision-making. In order to achieve real participation, people should enjoy other rights such as freedom of expression and assembly and the freedom to establish societies, in addition to having fundamental economic and social rights. This is because a citizen who is unable to provide food for his/her family cannot become a real or free participant in decisions which determine their fate and future. What is required after the elections is the expansion of channels through which decisions, laws and legislations pass, as well as improving services and living standards. If Parliament fails to achieve this, then the democratic process itself will be useless, something that decision makers and MPs should note.

Secondly: Maximize the margin of freedom to establish civil society organizations, and encouraging the youth to become involved in volunteer and institutional work. This will aid the spread of vitality and awareness in society, and achieve great strides in public culture and social and cultural services for the public.

Establishing civil societies and allowing them to carry out unrestricted activities, proves that the freedom of association exists, without which freedom becomes meaningless. In fact, the difference between dictatorships and democratic regimes can be found in legislations that govern the right to establish civil society organizations. The fewer the restrictions, the closer these regimes are to democracy.

We call for a tolerant attitude towards Bahraini civil society organizations and for the passing of a modern law that governs the establishment of NGOs and promotes freedoms. This law should also avoid the dominant and oppressive policies of the Executive Authority, encourage the increase in the number of these societies, and provide all the necessary means for them to achieve their goals.

Thirdly: Adopting educational curriculums that contribute in building a skilful and qualified generation, able to plan its future and live a dignified and prosperous life (in accordance with the 2030 National Plan). Also, there is need to educate the new generation to respect diversity, and, furthermore, helping them to develop a unifying national identity. Also, there is need to raise awareness among citizens about their rights and obligations, hence creating a harmonious society far from stereotyping and extremism towards the 'Other'.

Bridging the Gap

As a result of the rift between the Bahrain Human Rights Society (BHRS)



and the Ministry of Social Development, the National Institution for Human Rights (NIHR) is exerting all efforts to reach an amicable settlement between the two parties. NIHR met officials in the Ministry and leaders of the BHRS, in the hope that these efforts will be fruitful in the near future.

Full Membership for the Bahrain Transparency Society

The Bahrain Transparency Society received official recognition from Transparency International. A letter from the Chair of the Board of Transparency International Huguette Labelle, informed the Society that it had been granted full membership. The Society said that this recognition came after ten years of continued efforts by both its directors and members. It added that granting full membership will add new responsibilities on the Society to improve its work, and expand and diversify its base.

Ban on Political Publications and Blocks on Websites

On 20 September 2010, the Information Affairs Authority withdrew the publication licence of newsletter of two political parties, namely; the

Progressive Democratic Tribune (Al Taqadomi) and the Islamic Action (Amal), warning that it may take further legal procedures if they continue to breach the law. The Authority had previously banned the newsletters of both the Democratic Society and Al Wefaq, claiming that both had breached the law, which regulates publication by political parties. It also demanded that political parties address their problems in line with this law, and announced that it had permitted the publication of the newsletters following adjustments made by the said newsletters. A number of political parties' websites have also been blocked for the same reason. The Transparency Society criticised the restrictions made on the freedom of expression of societies, which are active in the political arena, and demanded the officials to reconsider their decisions that affect freedom of expression. Waad Society regarded the decisions as a confiscation of the different views, and accused the Information Affairs Authority of being selective in its implementation of the law, something which the Authority refuted.



First Woman to Win in the Council Elections

The recent elections were indeed a success. However, despite the high participation of women in the elections it resulted in one woman winning an uncontested parliamentary seat. In the C o u n c i l



elections, only Fatima Salman was elected to a Municipal Council in the Governorate of Muharraq. The King of Bahrain sent his congratulations to

the new Muharraq Municipal councillor saying: 'we were content to follow the first female victory in the Bahraini elections, and we are confident that your victory constitutes a landmark stride for Bahraini women towards comprehensive development and renaissance in our country. His Majesty also paid tribute to Bahraini women's vital role in society, hailing Ms. Salman as 'a good woman for Bahraini women'.

Workshop on Local MDG

On 11 October 2010, the Bahraini Economists' Society organised a workshop regarding Bahrain's millennium development goals. During his opening speech, the Vice-President Jaffar Mohammed demanded establishing an accurate definition and measure for the poverty line in Bahrain, which should be appropriate



for the country's situation and living standards. He added that dependence on oil as the single source of income undermines the stability of living standards, and that the steady increase in the growth of populations, as well as the repercussions of the financial crisis, all increase this threat to living standards. Finally, he stressed the importance of education and training in preparation for the needs of the job market.

Court Rules in Favour of Nabeel Rajab

Unsurprisingly, a Court has ruled in favour of Nabeel Rajab, the President of the dissolved Bahrain Centre for Human Rights, in his lawsuit against Akhbar Al Khaleej newspaper. This case, as well as many others, reveals the independence and impartiality of

Bahraini judges. On 19 October 2010, the High Criminal Court fined the Editor in Chief of Akhbar Al Khaleej newspaper Anwar Abdulrahman (100 Dinars) for the publication of articles, which include insults and accusations against the complainant.



The Bahrain Journalists' Association was not content with the Court's decision, and saw it as a threat to journalists, and a step which could add to future restrictions in freedom of expression in the Bahraini press. This is because the decision enforces the principle of holding any journalist personally accountable for his opinion, rather than the institution he works for.

The Society also said that while it had the utmost respect for the integrity

and decisions of the Bahraini Court, it believes that journalism cases are opinion-based, and hence they should not be dealt with like other cases of personal responsibility.

Regional Conference on Human Trafficking

A Bahraini human rights delegation participated in a regional conference organised by the Future Foundation in Jordan entitled: 'Building Networks for CSOs to Combat Human Trafficking in the MENA Region'. A delegation from the Bahrain Human Rights Watch Society participated in the conference, and was headed by Atiyat Allah Hasan Rohani, Abdullah Abdul Aziz and Ghada Ihsan as well as Nora Fulayfil from the Migrant Workers Protection Society.

Rohani gave a statistical presentation he had prepared during a visit to al



Badi police station, which included the number of Filipino domestic workers reported to have fled from their employers between 2009 and the beginning of 2010 (around 50 male and female workers). Rohani found that 30 workers had sought refuge in the Philippines Embassy, and that 12 of them had been sent home according to legal procedures, whilst 18 are still waiting for their official documents to be finalized. The remaining twenty however, remain missing, and have probably fallen prey to human traffickers.

Justice Minister Warns of Tampering with Security

In an interview with Al Hayat newspaper on 13/10/2010, the Bahraini Minister of Justice, Sheikh Khalid bin Ali Al Khalifa, said that the main purpose of holding elections is the belief that they are central to any democratic process. He added that elections form the basis of dialogue in constitutional institutions, and when probed on the question of transparency, he asked: 'why bother holding elections, if we do not want citizens' voices to be heard? Especially when these choices affect the citizen's present and future'.

The Minister said that no political society was prevented or obstructed from participating in the elections, and that political societies did not at all differ from national political parties. In fact, a law regulating political societies had been ratified by Parliament. Hence, all these societies had taken advantage of the wide margin of freedom available, and had participated in the elections.

Sheikh Khalid also denied that what happened to the BHRS was aimed at controlling the elections, asserting that current legislations give all national civil societies the right to send their representatives to oversee the elections. In response to the blocking of some party-affiliated websites, the Minister said that 'the sites in question have nothing to do with freedom of expression, which is a basic human right. Rather these websites were blocked because they contained scandalous material, which is at odds with the values of our society'.

The Minister also refuted that the recent arrests had anything to do with the elections or their timing, saying that Bahrain depends on a global banking system, and that there are 400 banks in the country. He continued by saying that 57% of our income comes from the services sector, which means that Bahrain cannot afford any acts

of terrorism which may threaten our safety or stability.

Finally, regarding claims of setbacks in the status of human rights in the country, the Minister answered: 'in my opinion there are no setbacks, and assurances exist for all those accused in any case, whether they are Bahraini or foreign citizens. As for any accusations and judgements made here or there, these are unfounded and negate the principle of justice. He continued: 'I am content with the procedures of Bahraini laws related to the agreements signed by Bahrain. Moreover, I cannot give my opinion on a case, which is currently at court, as it is for the judge to decide the fate of the accused, and each of them is innocent until proven guilty in a final ruling.'





Legal Actions Against Perpetrators of Violence

Bahrain was recently confronted by a wave of violence, riots and vandalism, which led to the detention of tens of individuals, many of whom have now been charged. However, there has since been a decline in violence, and the trials of those accused of involvement are continuing. The following panorama provides an overview of the current legal and security situation:

- On 2 October 2010, the Public Prosecutor announced the referral of a citizen from Aker village to the Psychiatric Hospital to check his mental condition. The person had been arrested in circumstances related to security issues.

- On 3 October 2010, the High Criminal Court found three defendants guilty of attempting to set fire to al Diraz Primary School for Boys, and sentenced each to three years' imprisonment. The school was attacked by burning bombs on 8 May 2010.

In the same date, the same Court ordered to carry out medical examination on two defendants involved in the 'Scrap fire', after claiming they were forced to do so. The fire took place in Askar, on 19 August 2010, and lasted for four days destroying properties and polluted both the environment and nearby residential areas. In another hearing session held on 10 October 2010, the medical report revealed injuries to the bodies of the accused but was unable to identify the time, reason, or device used in inflicting the injuries.

- On 3 October 2010, the Lower Criminal Court sentenced three individuals to a year's imprisonment for rioting and setting fires.

- On 6 October 2010, the General Prosecutor referred five defendants (one is currently on the run) to the High Criminal Court. The five individuals have been accused of plotting to bomb vital institutions in the country.

- On 6 October 2010, the Lower Criminal Court sentenced one person to a month's imprisonment for his involvement in riots.

- On 10 October 2010, the Court of Appeal ordered the Public Prosecutor to summon an individual to Court on 6 February 2011 due to his involvement in a car bomb in the village of Daih. The car exploded in April 2009, killing one accused and causing the other to lose his sight. The latter was sentenced to ten years' imprisonment.

- On 15 October 2010, security forces arrested three women from Sitra. The women claimed being subjected to 'mistreatment' by the security forces while being searched at the entrance to the village. On 17 October 2010, an official from the Ministry of Interior Mohammed Rashid bo Hamood said that the three women insulted the security forces verbally and physically, and that the testimonies of the security forces were recorded. The men were also referred to a hospital for medical examination.

- On 17 October 2010, the High Criminal Court sentenced two persons to five and three years' imprisonment respectively for using Molotov cocktails to burn the lighting box of the Osama bin Zaid Mosque.

- On 26 October 2010, the High Criminal Court sentenced six persons to five years' imprisonment for using bombs to attack the house of former Municipal Member Ali Mansour.. While announcing his intention to drop the case, Mansour demanded the release of the detainees.

- On 26 October 2010, the Lower Criminal Court sentenced a citizen to a year's imprisonment for distributing publications that incite hatred and contempt against the regime.

- On 1 November 2010, the Third High Criminal Court sentenced four youths to five years'

imprisonment, and a fifth one to three years' imprisonment, for burning rubbish bins and placing them in the middle of the street in Ras Ruman.

- Five citizens have been imprisoned for their involvement in the fire of Adhari Amusement Park, which took place on 14 March 2010. The five persons went to the park at night and set tyres on fire, which caused burns to three of them. The fourth individual then took them to hospital for medical treatment, and gave false information on how the injuries were sustained. The Court sentenced three of the defendants to seven years' imprisonment, and the fourth to three years, whilst the fifth individual is serving a six-month sentence.

- On 3 November 2010, Mohammed Mushaima, son of Hassan Mushaima, appeared before the Lower Criminal Court with another defendant in the presence of their lawyer. The trial was adjourned to 20 December 2010 in order for the defence to present their pleadings.

- On the dawn of 5 November 2010, 40 cars were vandalised by anonymous individuals who pierced their tyres. Complex 303 was also vandalised.

- On 6 November 2010, the High Criminal Court sentenced a citizen to three years' imprisonment for causing the explosion of a gas cylinder in the governorate of Muharraq and for setting tyres on fire. The defendant had previously been convicted and sentenced between two to five years' imprisonment in other security cases.

- On 17 November 2010, the High Criminal Court sentenced four persons to periods ranging from three to five years. The four persons had attacked a police patrol car with fire bombs on 20/11/2009. In a separate case the same Court acquitted a defendant of riot charges and tyre burning in the city of Muharraq.

Bahrain Prosecutes 25 Persons for Committing Violent and Terrorist Acts

On 28 October 2010, Bahrain began prosecuting 25 persons accused of inciting violence in accordance with Law No. (58) of 2006 related to the Protection of Society from Terrorist Acts. The first court session was held at the High Criminal Court III, and was presided over by Judge Ibrahim Al Zayed and the membership of Judges Ali Al Kaabi and Ali Al Dharani. It lasted for five and half hours.

The public hearing was attended by the families of the detainees, observers from Amnesty International, and a number of foreign embassies including the USA, France and the UK. Human rights activists, BHRM, NIHR, BHRS, fourteen lawyers, five MPs from Al Wafaq Society and a number of journalists and media representatives also attended the hearing.

The defence lawyers demanded to allow the media to publish the court proceedings, but the Court declined in line with the decision made by the Public Prosecutor on 26 August 2010. That decision was based on the sensitivity of the case, national security protection, upholding fair trial standards, and protection of the accused against rumours and defamation.

A high level official stated that the Court had given the accused a chance to reply to all charges against them, which include: forming an illegal group aiming

at hindering the Constitution and laws, preventing the authorities from conducting their work, harming national unity, and attacking private and public rights and freedoms; joining and funding this illegal group, despite being aware of its terrorist acts, such as setting fires, damaging properties, and possession of explosive materials with the intention of threatening people's lives; inciting hatred against the regime and other groups; spreading rumours inside and outside the country, which could undermine the State integrity; causing insecurity and harming public interest.

All the defendants – except one – said that they had been subjected to different kinds of torture. The judge documented the statements of the defendants, and read the charges to each one of them, allowing each a chance to respond. The defence lawyers requested a copy of the file, and that the detainees be referred to a forensic doctor to investigate torture allegations. Also, they requested that the detainees be transferred to a prison under the control of the Ministry of Interior instead of the National Security facilities, and finally that their families be allowed regular and longer visits.

The Public Prosecutor responded to this by stating that 'on 23 September 2010, the families of the accused were allowed to visit them during their interrogation.

Since then, visits have been taking place regularly, and around 10 family members were permitted to visit each detainee each time. Also, the Public Prosecutor did not receive any complaints from the families regarding visits. Furthermore, on 30 September 2010, the Public Prosecutor had issued an order allowing lawyers access to the accused'.

Judge Ibrahim Al Zayed agreed to most of the lawyers and detainees' requests, and thus ordered that the detainees to be moved to another prison, that their lawyers be allowed to meet with them for longer periods and present them with documents relating to the case, and that five of the detainees be allowed the medical treatment they required, as well as investigating torture allegations. The next hearing will take place on 11 November 2010.

So far, this public trial seems transparent, honest, and fair, despite what was said about breaches committed during the first days of detention. On 12 October 2010, the Justice Minister stressed in an interview with Al Hayat newspaper that "it is not possible for any evidence to be extracted through torture, because there is a principle in Bahraini courts called <legitimacy of evidence>. This obviously means that any evidence obtained under torture is inadmissible. Furthermore, courts do not even accept the mere suspicion of torture, let alone if evidence is provided, and the Court will investigate any torture allegations made by any detainee".

The Way Out of the Bahrain Human Rights Society Crisis

Hasan Moosa Shafaie

On 8 September 2010, and in a sudden move, the Ministry of Social Development issued an order dissolving the Bahrain Human Rights Society's Board of Directors, and appointed a temporary director for a period of eight months. This new administrator is an employee in the Ministry, and has been given the authority to run the affairs of the Society from its headquarters including processing applications for new memberships. This order, which was based on Law 21 of 1989 concerning societies, came as a shock to both local and international organizations, many of whom have issued statements urging the Bahraini Government to reconsider its decision.

The Ministry gave many reasons justifying this measure, including: the failure of the Society to comply with the aforementioned law including failure to prepare an annual budget; the existence of financial breaches and the receipt of money from abroad without informing the Ministry; training human rights activists from GCC countries on human rights; the failure to present final account to a Certified Accountant; engaging in politics; failing to call for a General Assembly or hold elections; failing to provide the Ministry with the minutes of the meetings of the Board of Directors. According to the Ministry, there were other complaints by citizens due to the Society's failure to condemn violence; limiting membership to specific political groups; insulting journalists; and coordinating with

illegitimate movements; mixing politics with human rights, which undermined its impartiality and professionalism; publishing statements on its website for illegal movements, which attack the political system. Finally, the Ministry outlined several irregularities in the Society's regulations, such as the failure to renew the licence for its affiliated body (Al Karama Centre), cooperating with foreign entities, and presenting unfounded complaints to foreign organizations.

The BHRS has rejected all these accusations, as well as the decision to dissolve its Board of Directors and appoint a Government



*Secretary General of the BHRS
Abdulla Draz and his Deputy*

administrator to run its affairs. Consequently, the Society filed a lawsuit against the Ministry's order on 19 September 2010, to which the Ministry responded on 6 October by filing an urgent lawsuit in order to force the Society to comply with its order. However, the court did not find the Ministry's suit urgent considering that there was already a lawsuit against the Ministry, so the latter dropped the case.

On 26 October 2010, the first court held its first session to look into the BHRS' complaints, during

which the Ministry requested the case be postponed in order to study the case. The case has now been adjourned to 4 January 2011, which will allow both parties to reach a settlement, something they both seem to desire.

Real irregularities and hasty measures

It is obvious that the BHRS has made several mistakes, and some of the Ministry's allegations are indeed true and undeniable. These mistakes include politicization of the Society, the dominance of a single political party, limiting membership, the existence of certain financial irregularities, and the failure to condemn violence for political reasons. On the other hand, some accusations were deliberately exaggerated and do not justify taking such a tough decision without previous warning.

The Ministry of Social Development should act in a paternal spirit towards civil society, and should not hold it accountable for every trivial mistake. It is the duty of the Ministry to guide and not to punish. This necessitates wise behaviour, even if this requires turning a blind eye to some small breaches. It is equally important that the overall work of the organizations is correct, and it is also crucial to anticipate the effect of any decision, even if it complies with regulations, on the reform project as a whole, as well as being aware of the negative repercussions of any decision.

Punishment cannot solve the politicization problem, for anyone studying the situation in Bahrain and the political and ideological background of the leaders of civil society organizations, will understand that political and human rights projects need the time and environment to mature.



*Minister of Social Development
Dr. Fatima Al Blooshi*

Undoubtedly, the BHRS bears part of the responsibility, however, in its current situation, it cannot be separated politically from its founder: Wa'd. I do not think that dissolving the Society is the solution, as this harms human rights and the reputation of Bahrain. We hope that human rights activists in Bahrain will realise the harm inflicted on the credibility and development of their cause, as a result of politicising human rights. We also hope that in the future, Bahraini society itself will be able to punish whoever manipulates human rights for narrow political purposes. Hence, we believe that the decision to dissolve the Society's Board of Directors came at the wrong time, and was also executed in an incorrect manner. It was possible to deal with the problem in a different way in order to safeguard

Bahrain's reputation, by guiding and supervising the development of the BHRS, despite any legal or administrative mistakes.

The Ministry in question should realise that the nature of the work of such societies obliges them to gather and publish information regarding human rights violations, and that it is the essence of their work to train and educate. Moreover, the margin of freedom in Bahrain encourages others, including countries and regional and international organizations, and even individuals, to benefit from this current openness.

The problem lies in the law

The Ministry of Social Development can refer to law 21 when addressing the breaches of the BHRS, so that its actions can be interpreted as an honest and professional implementation of that law. We also know that Law No. (21) of the year 1989 was issued long before the reform period, and that the amendments that were made to it in 2002 were not sufficient to constitute a modern law and were inadequate to meet the radical changes in Bahrain since 2001. Most Bahraini civil society organizations are not satisfied with it, and the Ministry of Social Development has realised that the law is not suitable for the current period. Therefore, the Ministry has presented a bill, which was discussed with civil society organizations, and we hope that this new bill will be urgently forwarded to the Parliament for ratification.

One of the most negative points

of the current law is the fact that it gives the Executive Authority extensive power to interfere directly in the details of the work of all NGOs. This makes adherence to its articles a burden for these societies, and even for the Ministry itself. This is because focusing on the details of the law, such as wanting to know everything in advance, and giving permission to all activities, is costly, time consuming and indicates a lack of trust in civil organizations. Any kind of pressure, censorship and direct interference in the internal affairs of NGOs will prevent them from achieving their objectives. Bahraini civil society organizations in general need the trust of the Government, freedom and social support in order to achieve great strides in their work.

Looking for a way-out and a compromise

The disagreement between the Ministry and the BHRS is now in the hands of the Court, and only the Court can have the final say in the decision to dissolve the Board, among other breaches. We believe that the Court rulings will be fair, and will satisfy both parties. However, we believe there is also an opportunity to resolve the issue through mutual dialogue. An impartial party such as the National Institution for Human Rights can also play a positive role in reconciling opinions, and it seems that both parties should reach a concession. We hope that the Ministry will revoke its decision, and that the BHRS addresses its irregularities in accordance with the law.

Amnesty International: Fact-Finding Mission to Bahrain

A delegation from Amnesty International, headed by Professor Abd al-Salam Sayyid Ahmad visited Bahrain in October 2010. The delegation included the researcher in the Middle East section Said Bou Madouha, as well as the Regional Campaigner in the Middle East and North Africa program, Covadonagadi Lakamba. The delegation met several officials and ministers, human rights activists, civil society organisations, the National Institution of Human Rights (NIHR), as well as Bahraini political figures, media institutions and other influential figures.

During the visit, the delegation was briefed on the political and human rights situation in Bahrain, and on 28 October 2010, attended the first public session of the trial of the detainees accused of involvement in violence. In addition, the delegation also had the opportunity to follow the elections, which took place on 23 October 2010.

Amnesty International had, since last August, issued several statements, in which it expressed its concern regarding allegations of human rights violations. This involved the detention of tens of individuals accused of inciting and perpetrating violent acts, such as blocking roads, setting fires and damaging private and public properties. On 18 August 2010, Amnesty International urged the Bahraini Government to disclose the whereabouts of eight detained individuals, among them clergymen, as it feared that they may be prisoners of conscience. It called upon the Government to explain the reason behind their detention, and either to release or charge them. It also

demanded access by all detainees to their families, lawyers and medical care. Furthermore, Amnesty urged the Bahraini Government to conduct an urgent and independent investigation regarding allegations of torture by a number of detainees, and also called upon it to ensure that these detainees are given a fair trial in accordance with international standards.

In another statement, Amnesty expressed its deep concern regarding the Government's decision to dissolve the BHR's Board of Directors, saying that this action undermined fundamental freedoms. It called upon the Government to immediately revoke the decision, and criticised the Associations Law No. 21 of 1989, for giving the authorities extensive power to prohibit organizations, freeze their activities or interfere in their internal affairs. Moreover, Amnesty issued two other statements on 6 September 2010, in which it stressed the importance of allowing the detainees to regularly contact their lawyers and families, something which had already been permitted.

Amnesty International visited Bahrain to examine the current situation, and was welcomed by the Government, which allowed the delegation full freedom to meet both Government and civil bodies. The Ministry of Social Development also prepared and coordinated meetings between the delegation and concerned parties, including NGOs. Initially, the delegation met the Minister of Social Development Dr. Fatima Al Buloshi, and a number of officials from the Foreign Ministry. On 28 October 2010, it

met the Bahraini Foreign Minister, and discussed the human rights situation, stressing the importance of cooperation and transparency in the relationship between the Government and Amnesty. The delegation also stressed the fact that 'the Kingdom of Bahrain has taken big steps in promoting democracy and human rights, in the context of the comprehensive reform project of HM King Hamad bin Esa Al Khalifa. Since HM ascended the throne, he has promoted human rights principles, such as citizenship, freedom of expression and the right to practise religious rituals'. The delegation also described these steps as 'a qualitative leap in the region.'

On 27 October 2010, the delegation met the Minister of Interior, during which he affirmed the King and the Government's eagerness to safeguard freedoms, including freedom of expression. He also pointed to the necessity of 'obtaining information from trustworthy sources', and on 'avoiding reliance on partial opinions that give a distorted view of events'. During the meeting, the delegation also discussed ways of mutual cooperation and coordination.

On 28 October 2010, the Amnesty delegation met with the President of the Information Affairs Authority, and discussed the reasons behind the closure of some websites, and the ban imposed on the political societies' newsletters. The delegation also met with NIHR, and discussed ways of mutual cooperation. The NIHR provided thorough analysis of recent human rights developments. Both parties stressed the importance

of continuing meetings and discussions in order to ensure mutual coordination in all human rights fields, and that NIHR should be a source of information for the human rights situation in Bahrain.

The delegation praised the establishment of the NIHR because of its role in promoting and safeguarding human rights in Bahrain. It also added that it was important for NIHR to become a solid and trustworthy bridge, through which Bahraini civil society organizations are able to communicate with official institutions. It also stressed that it was necessary for NIHR to maintain its impartiality, and not to succumb to pressure, be it from the Government or from civil society organizations.

Among those who also met the Amnesty delegation were: the Justice Minister, representatives from the Bahrain Human Rights Society, the General Director of al-Wefaq Society (political party), the Bahraini Bar Association, the families of detainees in recent security events, and the President of the Journalists' Association, Esa al-Shaiji. During a meeting with the latter, several issues were discussed including: freedom of press in the country; laws relating to freedom of expression including the Press and Publications Law, the Audio, Visual and Electronic Media Law; the role of the Journalists' Association in defending journalists; and the obstacles facing journalism.

Summary

Criticisms by international organisations of certain governmental procedures, which have led to human rights violations, do not necessarily indicate

that these organisations are deliberately attempting to defame the Government. Nor do they mean that international organisations are not genuinely concerned about the development of human rights in Bahrain, or that they are denying the achievements of the Government in this field. Local and international organisations have both criticised Government measures that restrict public freedoms, such as the closing of certain websites, withdrawing the licences of some party-affiliated newsletters, and dissolving the board of directors of a human rights society. We, among other human rights activists, believe that these measures are unsuitable and in fact harm Bahrain's reputation and the course of its reforms.

It is commendable that Bahraini officials have reconsidered their decisions, some of which came as initiatives from the King himself, who, for example, directly ordered the reinstatement of Bahraini citizenship to the representative of Sayid Ali al-Sistani in Bahrain, Sheikh Hussain Najati. There are also attempts to rectify the issue of the Bahrain Human Rights Society and other controversial issues, such as removing restrictions from some websites. Bahrain will not be harmed by minor offences by civil society organisations or by unintentional breaches by the Executive Authority. However, persistent breaches and the failure to address or rectify mistakes will certainly harm Bahrain's present and future reputation as well as the reform project. We hope that the Government and civil society organisations take seriously and positively the recommendations and comments of human rights organisations into account, especially Amnesty International.



Amnesty delegation meets the Foreign Minister



The delegation meets the Minister of Interior and his officials



With the President of the Information Affairs Authority



The delegation meets the Minister of Social Development Dr. Fatima Al Buloshi



The delegation meets members of the NIHR



Amnesty meets the President of the Journalists' Association

The Global Gender Gap Report 2010

Bahrain No. 4 in Arab World and 110 in the world

Bahrain has advanced 6 places in closing the gender gap, according to the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report 2010. Bahrain has been ranked 110 globally and 4 in the Arab world out of 136 countries. Bahrain was ranked 116 out of 134 countries last year.

The report's index attributed the rise to the improvement and development of women's status and their access to legislative positions, and positions among the senior officials and managers, as well as the increase number of women holding leading roles and ministerial positions. The rise came after the decline recorded by Bahrain in 2008, when it was ranked 121 among 130 countries.

Despite this development, the parliamentary elections held on 23 October this year showed a different reality that can be taken against Bahrain in relation to the participation of women in legislative positions. Just one woman won a seat by acclamation compared to 39 men. Unless this huge gap is rectified, Bahrain will drastically drop to lower positions in next year's report.

Because it is practically difficult to address the representation of women in the legislative organ at the present time, the Government should take a package of measures to reduce the gap in other areas, for example by increasing the number of women in the executive departments, the leadership of national institutions and companies, the diplomatic corps and the judiciary. Additionally, there is a need to continue strengthening

the political empowerment of women within the political parties and state political agencies. If this happens, Bahrain will rise to higher ranks because this year's report has ranked Bahrain 120, moving up 11 positions from last year's report, which placed Bahrain 131 in relation to political empowerment of women. According to the report, Bahrain has achieved a reasonable rise in the area of women's participation in the leadership of institutions, amounting to 4.91% compared to 4.83% in the last year.

It is worth mentioning that the Global Gender Gap Index examines the gap between men and women in four fundamental categories, namely: economic participation and opportunity; educational attainment; health and survival; and political empowerment, by measuring the rate of participation of women in Parliament and in ministerial positions.

The decline of the press freedom in Bahrain

Bahrain registered a sharp decline in the annual ranking of the 2010 Press Freedom Index, launched by the Reporters Without Borders (RSF) in October 2010. Bahrain is ranked 144 this year after it was ranked 119 globally last year. Thus, Bahrain dropped 25 positions in the Index. At the Arab world level, Bahrain is also dropped in the ranking from seventh in 2009 to eleventh in the current year. RSF attributed the sharp decline in

Bahrain in the world rankings to the growing number of arrests and prosecutions, particularly against bloggers and Internet users. The spokesperson for RSF Soizick Dolly, pointed to the decline in the situation of journalism and journalists in the Arab world in general compared to last year's report, he said that the two most exciting countries in the classification of this year are Bahrain and Kuwait, with Bahrain falling 25 positions and Kuwait declining 27 places, from the 60th last year to the 87th position this year.

The report pointed to the widening circle of repression in the Arab world. But many believe that RSF adopts inaccurate indicators to assess the states, which make the states that enjoy a wide margin of press freedom in a less status than the countries in the region known to suppress freedom of expression. It is worth mentioning that Bahrain has seen many challenges in 2010 in the area of freedom of the press including subjecting a number of journalists to harassment and also closing down a number of websites on the Internet. The legislative reforms needed to protect the freedom of the press and journalists are still at a standstill and journalists are still vulnerable to be imprisoned by virtue of the current law in force. The newly elected Parliament must carry out its constitutional duties to protect the freedom of the press and journalists as well as the adoption of the new press law, which prohibits jailing journalists. There is also need for judicial oversight over the closure of websites.

The New Parliament: A Chance to Promote Democracy & Protect Human Rights

Bahraini citizens recently elected their new representatives for Parliament, which forms one of the three pillars of State. Parliament is an important tool towards achieving political stability and is also an institution that reflects the people's will by providing them with a true chance for political participation and decision-making.

The main role of Parliament is to legislate and supervise. The former involves proposing, amending or rejecting laws, whilst the latter implies supervision of government practices, and holding it accountable for its actions through specific mechanisms such as questioning, discussing and withdrawing confidence. Other roles include debating the general budget, supervising government spending and the distribution of resources, ratifying financial and economic laws, endorsing economic agreements and partnerships with other countries or regional and international organizations.

Despite certain reservations regarding its performance during its previous sessions (2006-2010), Bahraini Parliament was successful to a certain degree for ratifying 112 laws, 270 bills and 619 proposals. It also succeeded in: establishing 12 parliamentary investigative committees; pushing the Government to increase financial support for housing projects; paying subsidies for the homeless; and increasing salaries to combat inflation during 2007-2008.

The Bahraini Parliament also adopted and ratified many laws related to human rights including: the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in 2007; the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights in 2006; combating trafficking in persons law in 2008; the Suni section of the

Family Law in 2009; ratifying the UN Convention Against Corruption in 2010. However, the Parliament was criticised locally and internationally for ratifying the Anti-Terrorism Act, which contains gaps regarding the legal assurances for the accused.

The performance of the last Parliament was below the expectations of voters due to the new experience of the Bahraini Parliament, the accumulation of problems, the weak cooperation between the Legislative and Executive Authorities and the lack of harmony between the various blocks inside the Parliament. Will the newly elected Parliament be better than the previous one in terms of performance and achievements?

Firstly: it is difficult for the Parliament to succeed in the public services sector without Government cooperation and vice versa: the weakness in Parliament's performance reflects on the performance of the Government in public services. Coordination between the Legislative and Executive Authorities will help both succeed, and this will aid the success of the reform experience itself.

Secondly: MPs should pay more attention to human rights, as promoting human rights and introducing the relevant laws and legislations will contribute to the promotion of social and political stability, as well as enforcing security in the country. Moreover, new MPs should also strive to increase their human rights achievements by promoting public freedoms, preparing programmes, and drafting resolutions and plans where both Parliament and the Executive Authority coordinate. This is in order to protect the dignity of human beings and their rights, and to prevent any restrictions, whatever the reason, and under any name.



There are many reports by international organizations which point to the occurrence of human rights violations. Parliament can investigate these allegations, and also has the authority to question ministers regarding any breaches that may have taken place.

Thirdly: MPs should pass the Press Law, which has been delayed for seven years. This is because the absence of any law regulating the work of the press and media (whether published, broadcast or online) will open the way for wrong interpretations, which may in turn lead to violations of freedom of expression. This can also be applied to the law that regulates the work of local NGOs, which has been delayed or perhaps even completely ignored.

Fourthly: one of the most important roles of the Parliament is to uncover corruption by enforcing the anti-corruption law (Law No. 7 for the year 2010), and encouraging the activities of parliamentary committees, in order to promote transparency and protect public funds.

Finally, periodic meetings should take place between MPs and voters, in order to inform them of any progress with regards to the promises made during election campaigns. Such meetings will promote trust between an MP and his/her voters, and in the new democratic experience itself. However, there are shortcomings among some MPs, which could affect their performances, and it is possible to tackle this problem through training and workshops designed to build MPs' abilities, strengthen their performance and skills.

■ On 22 October 2010, the President of the BHRM met Shaikh Khaled bin Ali Al Khalifa, Minister of Justice & Head of the Elections' Supreme Committee, at the media Centre to cover the parliamentary elections. His Excellency briefed the President on the measures that were taken to ensure the integrity of the elections.

■ On 20 October 2010, Hasan Shafaie met the Minister of Social Development and Ambassador Saeed Al Faihani, who is in charge of human rights in the Foreign Ministry. During the meeting, they discussed means of mutual cooperation and the reasons behind dissolving the Board of Directors of the Bahrain Human Rights Society.

■ The President of the BHRM also met the President of the Information Affairs Authority Sheikh Fawaz bin Mohammed Al Khalifa, in which he briefed Shafaie about the reasons behind the closure of some websites, as well as the banning of the newsletters of some political parties.

■ Shafaie also met the Advisor in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Dr. Abdul Latif Al Zayani, with whom he discussed the recent human rights developments, and the best means of dealing with Arab and international human rights organizations.

■ Shafaie met the Assistant Undersecretary and Member of the Elections Supreme Committee, Judge Khaled Ajaji, and discussed with him the legal safeguards implemented to ensure the integrity of 2010 elections.



During an interview with AI Hiwar TV Channel



And in another interview with ANB TV

■ He also met Abdulla Al Buainain, the President of the Legislation & legal Opinion Commission & member of the Elections' Supreme Committee.

■ On 24 October 2010, Shafaie attended a reception organised by the Resident Coordinator of the UN, Sayed Aga, on the occasion of UN Day, during which he had the opportunity to meet a number of political, diplomatic, media and human rights figures including the Italian Ambassador in Manama Enrico Padula, the Director and the Regional Representative of the UNEP/ROWA, Dr.Habib El-Habr, and the Regional Director of the UNIC, Nejb Friji.

■ The President of the BHRM paid a visit to Al Watan Newspaper and met journalist Mohanad Abu Zaytoon, who was attacked and wounded on 25 August 2010. Abu Zaytoon briefed Shafaie of the details of the incident, and stressed the position of the BHRM, which supports freedom of press and journalists against any assaults.

■ The London-based satellite Channel Al Hiwar and the Lebanese Channel ANB interviewed the President of the BHRM, during which he discussed the latest developments in human rights in Bahrain.

■ Finally, Shafaie participated in the opening of Asalam Centre in London. The Centre has been founded by Ayatolla Sayed Hussain Ismaeel Al Sader, one of the most prominent Shia scholars in Iraq. The occasion was attended by many Arab and British figures, including Sader himself.



Shafaie with the Italian Ambassador



The president of BHRM meets the Editor in Chief Abu Zaytoon



The President of BHRM meets the Justice Minister



During a meeting with the Minister of Social Development



With the President of the Information Affairs Authority



Shafaie meets Ayatolla Al Sader



With Judge Khalid Ajaji



With Abdulla Al Buainain – the President of the Legislation & Legal Opinion Commission & member of the Elections' Supreme Committee.