

# Bahrain Monitor

A Monthly Newsletter on the Human Rights Situation in Bahrain



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## Bahrain Enters the Political Solution Phase

Dialogue and national reconciliation are the only solution to the crisis in Bahrain. The Crown Princes' initiative was not given the opportunity to succeed because of the security situation inside the country. Since then security has been restored, and the time has come for a political process to take place.

The security measures alone cannot replace the need for a political solution, which is the guarantor for stability. This is due to the fact that security measures are primarily concerned with the restoration of the rule of law, and will not provide a comprehensive solution to the political crisis. The crisis may temporarily calm down only to explode in the future.

Resolving the current political problems requires a stable environment so that a long-term political solution is reached. This will stabilize the state and give time for recovery from the repercussions of the crisis.

It can now be said that Bahrain is ready for a political solution since the state of emergency is lifted, coupled with the King's initiative with regards to dialogue and national reconciliation. This shows that Bahrain has entered a new post-security phase where life is expected to go back to normal and different political language and tools are used.

Some have not yet recognized the fact that Bahrain has entered a new phase of tolerance, dialogue, rationality, national reconciliation and trust, which would hopefully heal the sectarian division. Their failure to understand this new reality would probably lead to calls for the extension of the state of emergency and the adoption of a divisive rhetoric, which undermine the national dialogue.

The overdependence on security measures will undermine the national dialogue and will not end the crisis. It will lead to a fragile stability without solving the root of the problem. The security solution might solve 10% or 20% of the problem, but the rest can only be solved by reaching a political consensus. This is due to the fact that the root of the problem is political and hence political tools should be used to deal with it.

One can also say that the security solution in Bahrain has reached its peak. In order to achieve real stability in the long-term, the national dialogue initiative represents the perfect remedy for the longstanding problems. This can only be achieved through negotiation, reconciliation, shared interests and promotion of social cohesion.

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# Improving the Human Rights Official Language

Hasan Moosa Shafeai

Although Bahrain has had a long experience in political reform and in dealing with human rights personalities, institutions and principles, official Bahraini political and media discourses remain erroneous and do not help in understanding the political and human rights situation in the country. This has negatively affected Bahrain's reputation as these discourses have also failed to adopt a language for the new post-reform Bahrain, which goes hand in hand with political and human rights developments in the country during last decade.

The recent rhetoric of a number of Bahraini officials contradicts the essence of the reform project and caused many misunderstandings especially with international human rights organizations. The objective of this article is to provide constructive evaluation of official Bahraini human rights discourse, in order to provide some guidance.

## The recipients of the discourse

In their communications with UN human rights mechanisms and international human rights organizations, officials should bear in mind that they are dealing with a different mindset which requires special attention. International human right bodies adopt a scientific and professional approach and can distinguish

between factual information and propaganda. On the other hand, in their debates and sometimes even in their statements, Bahraini officials cannot distinguish between the two. The 'scientific' human rights approach distinguishes between balanced and imbalanced views and is characterised by:

1. Presenting an honest and complete picture including positive and negative aspects. It is not enough to mention the achievements of Bahrain and then ignore the shortcomings. When an official provides an objective view of the situation for example, the recipient will have the impression that the official's country is genuine in its desire to improve human rights and that he is not just using propaganda.

2. Revealing the challenges and obstacles facing the State regarding human rights and the potential reasons for this. It should also show the potential corrective measures, which the Government plans to take in order to overcome challenges, obstacles and shortcomings.

Such a balanced and convincing discourse will ultimately serve Bahrain's reputation, preserve its position and promote its credibility.

## Characteristics of the official discourse

The shortcomings of the official discourse can be clarified as follows:

**The use of a contradictory discourse:** where two different languages are used: one for the Bahraini public in Arabic and another for audiences abroad in English. The first discourse tends to attack and accuse international human rights organizations, whilst the latter uses a tame language which affirms cooperation with human rights organizations and UN bodies, including performing joint activities that promote human rights. The English discourse also admits the occurrence of mistakes and shortcomings and promises to correct them.

The use of two languages, ignoring the fact that internal discourse is easily accessible to those abroad (all international human rights institutions follow local media, official statements and TV and social networks) casts doubts about the seriousness of Bahrain's reform project.

International human rights organizations are astonished by the change in official positions. They meet officials who use an ideal language abroad, but as soon as they return to Bahrain they use a different tone. What is worst is when words are put in the mouth of international organizations and UN bodies. Such a discourse must change in favour of a serious, responsible and credible one as using contradictory discourse damages the reputation of those officials and the Government.

Furthermore, any loss of face, which results from admitting Government mistakes is much less damaging than adopting two contradictory discourses.

**The use of accusations, excessive justifications and complaints:** official discourses accuse human rights organizations of being biased and infiltrated by foreign bodies as well as having hidden agendas. These accusations are constantly repeated in the local media and are sometimes mentioned by officials. However, the repetition of accusations as a defensive strategy is useless and could spark a losing battle with international human rights organizations and UN bodies. An article in the previous edition of the BHRM entitled (International Human Rights Organizations: Confrontation or Cooperation) stressed that adopting a confrontational strategy will only antagonise these institutions without changing the way in which they deal with Bahrain's situation. This discourse is also needlessly argumentative, for example by asking why these organizations do not condemn Israel or America or the Opposition. These countries have also been condemned and more reports have been issued about them than on Bahrain. In an article in this edition entitled ( Western Countries' Concerns over the Situation in Bahrain) we highlighted the western position, the reasons behind it and western advice to Bahraini officials to stop this kind of discourse.

Bahraini officials should stop this kind of rhetoric and examine

human rights reports closely whilst correcting any inaccurate information. The improvement and development of human rights in the country is more useful than arguments and blaming others.

Government discourse unnecessarily justifies official steps by asserting that they are all legal and correct and by saying that it is only the opposition that has made mistakes and violated human rights. Sometimes officials deny information, which later turns out to be true, and they are then forced to admit it.

A few officials have also been drawn to sectarian arguments with international human rights organizations, which merely aggravates the problem. It is far worse for an official to be involved in petty sectarianism than any member of the Opposition. This is because the Government should be more eager to protect the social unity and cohesion of the country and should thus use a comprehensive political discourse above social, sectarian, tribal and ethnic differences. When an official uses a layman terms, this degrades the position of the government he represents and reflects a badly on the performance of its institutions. It will also cause concern among human rights organizations and political and diplomatic bodies especially during the reform period, which had supposedly surpassed sectarian discourse. Such discourse will provoke the opponents to use the same level of language.

We also reject emphasizing

sectarian affiliations in international human rights reports as this will divide Bahraini society. International organizations do not accept cheap sectarian arguments made by an official who is drawn into petty sectarianism through the questions of journalists and responses to the foreign media.

### **Why has the official discourse on human rights not yet matured?**

There are weaknesses in the use of human rights literature in general, as well as problems in the training of officials on human rights, despite the many workshops that have been organized for this purpose. The last ten years should have produced specialised staff who are competent in human rights terminology and discourse, well aware of its effects and methods of use and most importantly, staff who are able to deal well with international human rights organizations.

A number of officials who deal with human rights do not have sufficient understanding of the mechanisms of international human rights organizations or the legislations and agreements regarding human rights. The subject of human rights has become a field of knowledge, which is developing very quickly. Hence, despite all exerted efforts to raise the competency of officials, there will always be a need for more training, technical and official efforts to develop human rights in Bahrain.

# Different Opinions on International Human Rights Organizations

International reports on Bahrain continue to express grave concern regarding the developments in the country. These reports are perceived differently by political activists and officials, as reflected in the local Bahraini newspapers:

**1/ criticism and conditional cooperation:** some say that international human rights organizations are biased and have their own agenda to escalate the situation by giving the opposition the opportunity to distort the image of the Government. This group of people believe that cooperation with these organizations should be linked to their position towards Bahrain.

On 26 April 2011, the Minister of Social Development Fatima Al Balushi responded to Amnesty International's Briefing Paper entitled 'Bahrain Human Rights Crisis'. She deeply regretted the release of the Paper despite deep concern about its objectivity and neutrality, which was evident in the refusal of Amnesty's delegate to meet with groups who were ready to answer questions regarding anti-government claims.

The Minister viewed the Briefing Paper as a good example of pre-prepared allegations without attempting to verify their credibility, accuracy, or to investigate other sources

or viewpoints.

However, the Minister stressed that Bahrain is prepared to continue its cooperation with Amnesty International and reaffirmed that the Organisation is welcomed to visit Bahrain as often as necessary to discuss such matters.

**2/ Criticism, accusation and refusal to cooperate:** another opinion, which is adopted by some MPs, considers these organizations as political tools, and it is a waste of time to follow their demands since it will only disperse the efforts of government' institutions. Furthermore, any clarifications provided by Government will be useless and will not change the position of such organizations and they will not refer to them in a balanced manner. Therefore, Bahrain should not listen and cooperate with these organisations and they should be prevented from visiting the country.

On 15/6/2011, MP Abdulrahman Bo Majeed strongly criticised the decision to allow the Assistant Secretary for State for Democracy and Human Rights and Labour, Michael Posner to visit Bahrain and said "we do not want foreign officials interfering in our internal affairs. Instead of aiding us to achieve national reconciliation, they escalate

the situation. Posner meets whoever he wants, visits houses and interferes in the work of the Judiciary. Some treat Bahrain as if it is still a colony. What gives an American official the right to investigate our situation?. Which Governmental body is responsible for this? And who gave him this opportunity?" MP Adel Al Asomi also said: "How can an American official be allowed to enter the country and interrogate the people. We all know his intention and his allies."

**3/ improving cooperation:** the third opinion says that regardless of the mistakes made by these international organizations and despite the shortcomings in their reports, they are influential institutions that should still be respected. Therefore, we must cooperate with and benefit from their comments and recommendations despite their criticism of the situation in Bahrain. At the end of the day, these organizations cannot be ignored, surpassed or underestimated. The BHRM believes that confronting international human rights organizations is futile and will harm Bahrain and will not benefit the development of human rights. They have power in the international arena and in the media; hence there is no other choice but to deal with them in a positive manner.

## Concerns Over Human Rights

# How Can Bahrain Reassure International Human Rights NGOs

Bahrain's human rights record was strongly criticised during the current crisis. In response, the Government attempted to reassure UN bodies and human rights organizations by sending them official letters, parliamentary and official delegations , as well as meeting with representatives of international human rights organizations inside Bahrain. However, these organisations remain concerned and critical of the human rights situation in the country.

The main reason for this is that government insitutions have not dealt well with the causes of international concern. Instead, they frequently discussed subjects which are unrelated to the issues raised in the reports of human rights institutions.

International human rights reports contain specific points, which should be responded to and explained by the officials responsible. These organizations have a limited interest in the political and security situation in Bahrain unless it provides a contextual framework for their work. For example, presenting the issue of human rights as a secondary appendage to the political and security situation will not calm the anxieties of human rights organisations whose main concern is to what extent are human rights being respected in the context of the political reform project.

Also, focusing on the violations committed by the Opposition and its

followers cannot replace addressing the specific violations presented in the human rights reports. Some organizations might even consider the Government approach as an attempt to justify its own abuses when the main issue of human rights is ignored in favour of lengthy explanations of the political and security situation.

S o m e t i m e s government officials do not answer the questions of human rights groups directly. For example, when a human rights organization asks why a certain detainee was not allowed to have a lawyer, the ideal response would be to provide them with documents proving that the detainee was given this right

from day one, and that investigations were conducted in the presence of a lawyer. What happens instead is that the concerned authority provides the organisation with documents detailing the charges against the detainee, which they already have. These organizations are primarily concerned with evidence that trial procedures are being conducted

in accordance with the standards of a fair trial, from the beginning of detention until the passing of the verdict.

The general answer given about detainees is that they were dealt with in accordance with the Law,



### Bahrain: Speaking Softly

May 2011

#### Overview

Bahrain is the smallest country in the Middle East – about a quarter of the size of Rhode Island, with a similar number of people (around 1.2 million). On February 14, 2011, reform protests – inspired by events in Tunisia, Egypt, and elsewhere – began. The vast majority of those protesting were Shi'ite Muslims, members of the branch of Islam to which most Bahrainis adhere, calling for a government elected by the people and an end to discrimination in employment and other areas of Bahraini life. Their protests were centered around the Pearl Roundabout area of Bahrain's capital, Manama. Some pro-government demonstrators, mostly from the minority Sunni community, also organized rallies. The Bahraini government broke up the reform protests in a crackdown that left at least 15 people dead and at least seven more people were killed. The security forces withdrew from the Pearl Roundabout on February 18, the demonstrators reclaimed the area, and the protests resumed. Some elements of the protesters started to call for more radical reforms, including an end to the monarchial rule of the Druze al-Khalifa dynasty. Some protests turned violent, and there are reports that some antigovernment protesters entered the university and attacked students, while others attacked Asian migrant workers, causing three deaths.

On March 15, a State of National Safety was announced in Bahrain. The following day, the Bahraini security forces, backed by 1,000 troops from neighboring Sunni-ruler Saudi Arabia, stormed protesters at the Pearl Roundabout area for the second time, and cleared the demonstrators in a large show of force. At least two protesters and two policemen were reportedly killed and scores of protesters injured by the security forces.

Since then, the country has seen a wave of arbitrary arrests, widespread and credible reports of torture, attacks on Shi'ite religious sites, large numbers of people suspended or fired from their jobs, at least four deaths in custody, and the killing of other Bahraini citizens on the street under suspicious circumstances. A Bahraini government official told Human Rights First that he did not know how many people the government had arrested since the middle of March in connection with the political protests. While the Bahraini security forces have released some, they are still arresting others. Security forces have detained over 800 people, and possibly many more in all. The Bahraini government has put dozens of people on trial in military courts, and four Shi'ite men have been sentenced to death. Bahrain's King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa has said the State of National Safety, announced on March 15, will be lifted on June 1.

which is an insufficient response to a question that requires a specific and documented answer. The primary concern of international human rights organisations is to ensure that local laws conform with the international human rights conventions that Bahrain has signed.

In other occasions, these organisations inquired about

government procedures and were presented with incomplete answers. The dismissal of workers is a case in point: the Government said these workers were absent from work without any legal justification and thus caused financial damages in both private and public sectors. However, the same law according to which these workers were dismissed contains legal assurances, which prohibit arbitrary dismissals and provides the right of appeal, including the use of an independent body to ensure that the dismissals were not arbitrary. Furthermore, even after the dismissals, what are the employee's rights, based on this same law? And was it applied at the time? If the dismissals in Bahrain had been limited to a few persons, this issue would not have constituted a big problem, but when hundreds are being sacked in a short period of time, the observer's first impression would be that there was a systematic policy in this regard.

Countries distrusted by international human rights organizations are repeatedly required to provide evidence that they are acting according to human rights standards. Providing general answers, citing local laws or half measures are all unacceptable.

International organisations remain apprehensive for these reasons, and have expressed their concern in various reports, including those released by International Crisis Group, Freedom House, Doctors for Human Rights, Human Rights First, Amnesty International, Reporters Without Borders and the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights.

In order to calm these fears, government bodies should first scrutinize the causes for concern outlined in the reports and then consider their suggestions for remedial measures. Verbal pledges and assurances are insufficient, especially when human rights organisations see that they do not

correlate with the decisions and procedures implemented on the ground. It is important to note that some of these suggestions are inaccurate and unrelated to the issue of human rights, or contain unnecessary procedural details.

### Concerns:

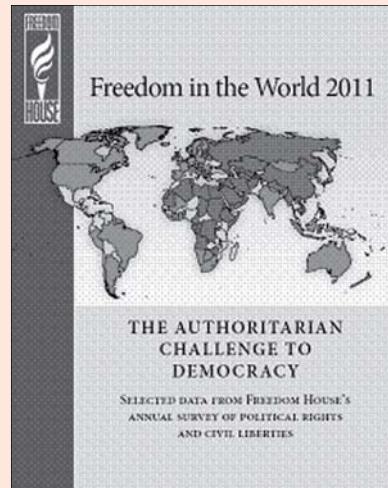
- Insufficient steps to stop the discourse of hatred and sectarianism in the media.
- Restrictions on peaceful gatherings.
- Restrictions on human rights activists to do their work freely, and the detention of many.
- Refusal to adhere to the standards of a fair trial and continuing to use 'National Safety Courts'.
- The deaths in custody of a number of detainees.
- Restricting freedom of expression, detaining some journalists and dismissing others.
- The deaths of a number of

## Freedom House: Deterioration in Freedom of Expression

According to Freedom House's annual report on freedom of press around the world, Bahrain's position has declined six places from last year to 159th in the world. Bahrain also came in 12th place in freedom of press out of the Arab states, 3 down from its position last year and 2 down from its position 2 years ago.

According to Freedom House's point system, Bahrain scored 72 points this year compared to 71 last year, which put it on the list of 'un-free' states in terms of freedom of

press. The report stated that Bahraini legislation on websites is too harsh because the Telecommunications Regulatory Authority controls the contents of websites, including electronic publications. It also mentioned the amendment to the law in 2008 which cancelled censorship and potential prison sentences against journalists, yet journalists and Internet surfers may still be in danger of legal action, according to the Anti-Terrorism Act and the Penal Code.



- protesters, shot by the security forces.
- The detention of a number of Opposition leaders and workers.
  - Allegations of the torture of detainees.
  - Detention of many doctors and nurses.
  - Cessation of scholarships, both inside and outside the country.

### Recommendations:

- Conduct independent and transparent investigations into human rights abuses in Bahrain and holding all those responsible accountable: from the individuals who gave the orders to those who carried them out.
- End discrimination.
- End the harassment of human rights defenders and release those detained.
- Release all those detained for practicing their rights of peaceful

- expression and assembly.
- End arbitrary arrests.
  - Investigate allegations of torture and ill-treatment, activate guarantees to prevent torture such as putting an end to solitary confinement and guaranteeing the rights of detainees to have visits and lawyers.
  - Protect places of worship and respect the religious freedoms of all Bahrainis.
  - End the arbitrary dismissal of workers and take the necessary procedures to reinstate them as soon as possible.
  - Guarantee a fair trial for criminal cases before civil courts where all the conditions of a fair trial are provided and put an end to emergency courts.
- In order to address the concerns of the international human rights community, officials in Bahrain can adopt a different approach in dealing with the contents of these reports, by

**POPULAR PROTESTS IN NORTH AFRICA AND THE MIDDLE EAST (III):  
THE BAHRAIN REVOLT**

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International Crisis Group  
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CONFLICT WORLDWIDE

correcting any mistakes when they occur and providing documentation to support this. The Government can also deal with the accurate cases mentioned in the reports, and then inform the organizations of any corrective measures. This would help build trust, and prove that it is serious about respecting human rights as well as providing the opportunities for individuals to file complaints.

## BHRM Welcomes the Establishment of the Ministry of Human Rights

Bahrain Human Rights Monitor welcomes the Royal Decree, which renamed 'The Ministry of Social Development' 'The Ministry of Human Rights and Social Development', saying that it highlighted the importance of human rights locally, and the necessity of improving it in line with Bahrain's international obligations.

The BHRM added that what distinguishes this new Ministry is that it consists of a managerial and administrative base of three administrations, each specialising in

one aspect of human rights, whether it involves responding to international obligations, or communicating and liaising with human rights organisations or dealing with the legal requirements of adhering to international obligations.

The BHRM believes that the new Ministry will allow Bahrain to improve its internal human rights record, as well as maintain its credibility abroad, as it will provide more opportunities for interaction with human rights bodies and institutions inside and outside the country on the



basis of transparency and objectivity.

The BHRM hopes that this Ministry will deal seriously with all the pressing human rights issues through the use of comparative legal studies, a new legal discourse and a professional performance that will make up for the previous faults in the Government's performance.

## **Hasan Moosa Shafeai:**

### **Dialogue Requirements: Conducive Environment and the Participation of all Parties**

In an interview with Al-Bilad newspaper on 9 June 2011, the President of the BHRM Hasan Shafeai said that the King is determined to see the national dialogue and national reconciliation succeed. National dialogue will lay the foundations for a new era, which will promote stability and restore Bahrain's social cohesion. Shafeai also added that many obstacles lie ahead, but that dialogue is the right way forward adding that steps should be taken to ensure that it succeeds.

Shafeai also stressed that all parties should participate in this national dialogue, and that a policy of political accommodation be adopted. This will strengthen the political system and result in a comprehensive solution, and can be achieved by putting into place a long term strategy for Bahrain in order to overcome future problems.

With regards to human rights, Shafeai said that too much false and exaggerated information was published in the media. He also added that international human rights organizations are not intentionally targeting Bahrain and that not enough information was passed on to them so that they could correct their press releases and reports. He also stressed the importance of the role played by these organizations, adding that they should be dealt with in a positive manner as they wield significant influence in the international arena.

BHRM's statements with regards to the King's proposal for dialogue shows that you are optimistic about the future and that Bahrain's crisis will end in the foreseeable future. What makes you so optimistic?

We are optimistic because this kind of political crisis initially requires recognition that (a) a problem exists, (b) other parties in the political process can either complicate or help solve the problem, and (c) that dialogue is the only logical way out of the crisis. States cannot resolve their problems by resorting to brute force, but by taking into consideration the mutual interests

of the parties concerned, and promoting a political partnership with opponents.

The King's determination with regards to dialogue is very important. We understand that there are pessimistic parties who will not accept the very principle of dialogue, but all parties must realise that political bickering cannot build a country, and that a stable political system is one that can overcome its problems with minimal losses. This can be achieved by adopting a policy of political inclusion, promoting shared interests and partnership in state-building.

This painful crisis was an



*Hasan Moosa Shafeai*

opportunity for all parties to test the limits of their power, and to discover their weaknesses through the consequences of their actions. Our optimism with regards to dialogue is based on the lessons learnt from this bad experience and based on the King's determination. Many obstacles lie ahead, but dialogue is better than conflict.

The opposition has previously rejected the Crown Prince's dialogue initiative and set unreasonable preconditions. Everyone knows that this was a mistake. Will the opposition make the same mistake twice?

Most opposition parties announced that they are ready to engage in dialogue. However, Al-Wefaq's acceptance includes some pre-conditions, which reflect its concerns. But this can be overcome. The dialogue process will be difficult given the fact that the crisis is still ongoing and there is a feeling of distrust. Many questions will be raised in the upcoming weeks that need to be answered, particularly those relating to the framework, mechanisms and themes of dialogue as well as the nature of the participants.

Bahrainis are still feeling the repercussions of the crisis. The political rhetoric continues to provoke strong reactions, which make initiating dialogue difficult. Bahrainis need to be prepared for dialogue and put an end to this tension. We must not forget that this political crisis created a deep sectarian division inside the country, which is a cause for concern in the future. A suitable atmosphere needs to be created which would encourage participation in dialogue and give hope to all Bahrainis.

What do you mean by preparing the public for dialogue?

We hope that dialogue will lead to national reconciliation and partnership to develop Bahrain. We want to see a comprehensive solution, but some parties believe that any dialogue with the Government is useless. On the other hand, there are some who believe that dialogue with the Opposition will be ineffective.

Distrust and the continuation of the political crisis will ultimately reflect negatively on Bahrain's reputation.

Bahrainis need to understand that dialogue will not compromise their rights and is in their best interest. Dialogue provides a means to share and discuss common concerns, solve problems and improve the standard of living of Bahrainis. Bahrainis are all equal and our main concern should be the problems facing our country.

With regards to preparing a suitable atmosphere, one could

This amnesty will alleviate tensions and facilitate dialogue. Additionally, amnesty is very important at this time due to the nature and severity of the crisis that led to social and political division, and because of the impact of the crisis at the regional and international levels. However, some people oppose the idea of a royal pardon, especially for those who were involved in the killing of innocent civilians. It must be said that there are no winners in this crisis since all Bahrainis are losers. Right now it is important to

say that what took place in Bahrain in recent months has created new problems. Everyone complains and sees themselves as victims. There are some basic and critical issues that need to be addressed in preparing a suitable climate for dialogue, which include:

1. The launch of a national reconciliation project that provides for a royal pardon for most detainees.

concentrate on the future instead of dwelling in the past. A new page should be opened concentrating on a comprehensive and permanent solution in order to avoid repeating the same mistakes again.

2. The need to guide the media in order to put an end to sectarian rhetoric as it complicates matters and increases tensions.

### 3. The appropriate preparations

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for dialogue by identifying the participants, subject matter and the implementation mechanisms.

4. The review of some inappropriate measures which had a deep impact on society, including the sacking of employees, stripping scholarships from students, destroying places of worship and deaths in detention. Reviewing these measures will build trust and show that the Government is serious and it will also change the behaviour of the public.

It is worth noting that the Government has taken steps to improve the situation on all fronts, especially with regards to the establishment of a complaints committee to review redundancy cases. Also, the Ministry of Education has restored some scholarships and more importantly, the Minister of Interior has referred some security personnel to the Military Court for causing the deaths of detainees. This is what human rights organizations have demanded from the Government. Such a measure will show that the State is both confident and courageous, and will strengthen public trust in the complaints mechanism.

**Based on what you are saying, there are many challenges facing dialogue, which many oppose.**

The challenges are real but it is very important that a comprehensive solution to the crisis is reached to prevent its recurrence in the future. Strategic issues need to be taken into consideration and we

need a system that can withstand any regional tensions.

There are many challenges that can only be overcome through a collective effort. Had there not been a big problem at the start of the crisis, there would not have been a need for such a comprehensive dialogue. One of the main challenges lies in the fact that there are two political parties which represent the Shia, namely; Al-Wefaq Society and the societies that reject political participation and call for the removal of the regime. The participation of both groups in dialogue is essential, especially the latter, as the political system should have the ability to accommodate all parties. One of the main strengths of any political system is its ability to include new emerging political forces.

We call upon the Government to engage in a separate dialogue with the hardliners, in order to come to an understanding. If these parties refuse to participate we should try again and again, and if the Government fails in its attempts to accommodate them, then a national consensus will arise, which will sideline these groups.

Calls for dialogue have also been made by countries, which have undergone similar political and social crisis. The political system in Bahrain permits dialogue to take place with the hard line parties, which refuse to participate in the political process. His Majesty the King understands that the strength of any regime lies in its ability to politically accommodate all parties, which is why he met some of their

leaders. A strong political system does not fear dialogue but views it as one of the most important tools in achieving reform.

**You concentrate on dialogue with the Shia, what about the other parties?**

Who are the participants in the national dialogue? The political parties? Social forces? Dialogue should primarily be between those who negotiate the agreement and sign it. They should have a strong public base and representation so that they can enforce any agreement. The sectarian division in the country means that a representative of both sects, Shia and Sunni, should be present during dialogue, as well as the Royal Family. The Royal Family should be the guarantor of any agreement to ensure that the country is politically balanced. The cooperation of these three groups make dialogue a success and will build the future of the country.

National dialogue should try to include those who oppose it so that the public becomes unified. Whoever participates in dialogue should accept the fundamental principles of the political game. It is not in the interest of the regime, opposition or the public to delay dialogue. It is important that dialogue results in a comprehensive solution, which can restore Bahrain's image. It is important that Bahrain becomes a model in the Gulf region through its political diversity, religious tolerance and its wide margin of freedom of expression.

**Let us move to human rights.**  
Why do international human rights organizations continue to show animosity towards Bahrain, despite the fact that a lot of inaccurate and exaggerated information was uncovered?

Inaccurate information was circulated by the media with regards to the role of foreign workers in confronting the protestors, which the Indian embassy had denied. There were allegations that some deaths were caused by tear gas, which were later found to be untrue. There were some allegations that people had died under torture (e.g. Miyad Abdullah Mohammad) who was later found to be alive and well. Some information regarding torture was also fabricated as well as the number of deaths, detentions and sackings, which was exaggerated.

International organizations do not intentionally publish inaccurate news and have no personal grudge against Bahrain and its regime. They try hard to have a clear picture on the political situation and the events taking place in the country. They do their best to obtain information but complain that Bahraini officials refuse to cooperate or provide them with the necessary information.

**There is a general feeling that international organizations have a political agenda.** They fail to document the breaches of the opposition and are accused of fuelling sectarianism. Perhaps this is the reason why some ignore their reports and refuse to cooperate with them.

International human rights organizations are not concerned with local politics and do not adopt the demands of the opposition. They do not comment on the political disagreements and their primary concern is that human rights are respected by both the Government and opposition, but they are primarily concerned with the government's human rights violations, since it bears responsibility for its people. Governments are also responsible for implementing the law and respecting their citizens' rights, hence their behaviour is continually scrutinized. The opposition's violations should be addressed within the legal framework of the state and in accordance with international human rights conventions, as they are unacceptable and condemned by international human rights organizations. For example, in Amnesty International's report, which was issued on 21 April 2010, the opposition's violations were documented, even though some believe that the report did not go far enough. Perhaps this was due to the fact that not enough information was available to the Organization.

With regards to the reasons behind the use of sectarian language by international human rights organizations, the BHRM previously discussed this problem and made clear that the use of constant sectarian references is harmful. We have also informed the organizations concerned that use of sectarian terms, without any justification is unacceptable. The BHRM also understands that the use of sectarian language is due

to the western mindset of these organisations.

These issues do not usually prevent states from cooperating with international human rights organizations, as these organizations have a large influence on political positions, laws, parliaments, media and global public opinion. They are a force to be reckoned with on the international political arena and hence confronting them or refusing to cooperate with them is unwise. The end result will not favour the state involved, even if that state was the United States of America itself!

**How do you see the future of human rights in Bahrain?**

One of the main objectives of the reform project by His Majesty the King was to develop human rights and to move Bahrain to an advanced level in comparison with neighbouring countries. However, recent events have negatively affected human rights and we hope that the national dialogue will lead to an improvement. We also hope that the crisis will end and that human rights societies, including the National Institution of Human Rights (NIHR) will become active again. It is important that state institutions become more concerned with human rights. We hope that the national dialogue will add new momentum to human rights activities, programs and workshops, so that they again become a focal point for international human rights organizations. This will ultimately be in the interest of human rights in Bahrain.

## **Human Rights - A Pretext for Foreign Interference**

The Bahrain-US relations have been badly affected by human rights. A number of American officials harshly criticised the situation in Bahrain, which sparked a strong reaction from Bahrain's political and journalistic bodies. The latter strongly condemned the US interference in the country's internal affairs and for conspiring against the regime, as well as being biased towards specific social groups.

The purpose of this article is to draw attention to some points, which may not be visible in the eyes of some political and religious leaders:

1. There is misunderstanding about the concept of state sovereignty, as well as the principle that governs international relations that emphasizes the non-interference in the affairs of other countries. The idea that states should not interfere in the internal affairs of other countries has changed. In practice interference has become legitimate because of the binding nature of international human rights instruments, which put pressure on every country that has signed them. International relations at present no longer accept that a country can do whatever it likes to its people. International community cannot keep silence against human rights violations; even Russia and China are not exempt when violating conventions. Human rights has become an influential subject in

international relations, it is no longer an internal affairs issue but rather an international issue.

Interference has become a reality and there are numerous cases where the Security Council has issued resolutions permitting the use of military force against oppressive regimes (e.g. Libya). Hence, protesting against foreign interference is useless whether we liked it or not. Bahrain should adopt a different approach in dealing with the criticisms of foreign countries concerning its human rights record.

2. Human rights play a crucial role in the relations between states, whether they are friends or foes. Human rights can be used by any country against another. The human rights record of the US has also been criticised, with regards to the cases of both Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo Bay prisons.

The use of human rights by super powers against Bahrain is not new. Despite being friends, many countries do not like to be classified as supporters of human rights violators, which would badly affect their reputation, interests and position in the international arena.

Human rights has become a standard in international relations as well as an excuse to interfere in the internal affairs of other countries. It is important that countries do not ignore criticisms directed at their human rights records and adhere to international

human rights conventions so that their reputation and international relations remain intact.

3. Of course human rights cannot be taken outside of its political context. Some may use it for noble purposes whilst others may use it for political gain, which we reject. Similarly we do not accept human rights violations, and taking advantage of the issue is a problem that needs to be solved. In order to put an end to the misuse of human rights and limit foreign interference in our affairs, we must improve our human rights record.

4. It is important to understand the changes that are taking place in our time. A new Middle East is taking shape, which is being pushed by the youth who hold different aspirations from the past generations. This new generation aspires for democracy, human rights, political participation and is armed with contemporary technological communication tools. Failure to consider reforms is very dangerous, since it will isolate us from this new emerging world. We are responsible for establishing stability and security as well as meeting the legitimate aspiration of our people. We should respect public's choice and should not circumvent or fulfil part of their demands. We need a mindset that understands this generation and the changes taking place in our region and the world so that they can be dealt

with in a wise way and so that a free, independent, stable and respectable country can be built.

This is the challenge that we face. The controversy regarding foreign interference in Bahrain is a direct reflection of the blurred vision in tackling this challenge. We are left with two choices; either to improve our human rights situation or continue to make the same mistakes that undermined our reputation and relations with our allies. Regardless of whether Washington, London, Paris or Brussels' interference is driven by ethics, or interests and blackmail, it still needs to be dealt with.



This is not to defend the US position; rather we are trying to understand it for a better understanding of our human rights issues. Assistant Secretary of State Michael Posner was the fourth American official to visit Bahrain during the crisis. He held a press conference in Manama on 15 June 2011, in which he stressed that Bahrain is an important partner with a long standing alliance with the US based on shared political, economic and security interests. He expressed his concern as a friend of the Bahraini people

on the human rights situation in the country and announced his country's willingness to provide assistance in building a peaceful and prosperous future for Bahrain. On the other hand, he said that respecting human rights and the pursuit of security are not in conflict. He criticised the expulsion of students, the dismissal of workers and journalists, and the continued detention and ill-treatment of some detainees. He urged the Bahraini Government to fulfil its commitments with regards to local law and international conventions. He also stressed that an appropriate

environment should be created so that the national dialogue begins, which would include all parties. He also criticised the media for dividing society by spreading hatred

that could eventually lead to violence.

Many journalists and MPs criticized the US official's statements and considered them a direct interference in Bahrain's internal affairs and accused him of trying to hinder dialogue. On 15 June 2011, an MP said "we do not want foreign officials interfering in our affairs, instead of aiding national reconciliation they escalate the situation. Posner meets anyone he wants, visits houses and interferes in the work of the judiciary". He also added "some US officials

behave as if Bahrain is still under colonial rule. Why do US officials stay in Bahrain for four days to investigate the events?"

On 14 June 2011, a parliamentary block said that the US wants to use Bahrain as a scapegoat to prolong its presence in Iraq: "Bahrain freed itself from colonization four decades ago. It is an independent sovereign state and we do not want a mandate imposed on us again."

This rhetoric was repeated by many journalists and political parties. However, the official Bahraini position was mature and understood the effect that human rights has on international relations, particularly statements expressed by the Crown Prince and Minister of Foreign Affairs. Ambassador Abdullaah Abdulatif, the Under-Secretary of the Foreign Ministry welcomed Posner's statement confirming the long standing partnership between the two countries. He also welcomed the US statement, which called for a comprehensive dialogue, a suitable climate for dialogue and the participation of all parties without preconditions. This affirms the Kingdom's commitment to reform, human rights and freedoms that are guaranteed by the Constitution. He also added: "all parties concerned agree that dialogue and creating a suitable climate will achieve calm and stability, guarantee a dignified standard of living and coexistence between Bahrainis, which everyone strives for".

# Western Concerns over the Situation in Bahrain

Many Western countries such as the USA, UK, France and Germany, all considered friends of Bahrain, have strongly criticised the Kingdom's recent security measures. The statements issued by these governments reflect an increasing concern that these measures could lead to the failure of the reform project and cause long-lasting instability. There was also concern that these measures could aggravate tensions in the region in a way that would serve the interests of the enemies of the West and its allies.

On the other hand, some Bahraini journalists regarded these statements as interference in Bahrain's internal affairs and added that they are biased towards a specific social group. Some also claimed that the USA aims to radically change the Kingdom's political system.

The general fear of the West's position parallels some regional views which claim that Washington is willing to sacrifice its friends, such as Egypt, on the pretext of defending human rights and promoting democracy.

An impartial reading of Western views on the crisis in Bahrain has led to the following conclusions:

1. Countries in the West generally support the current regime in Bahrain and are keen for its stability. They are also in favour of establishing a constitutional monarchy, which allows a reasonable amount of freedom, promotes democracy and respects human rights. The West is not ready to compromise Bahrain's security at the expense of regional conflicts.

2. The West also wishes to see Bahrain as a country that is heading towards democracy (which it indeed was before the recent painful events). Democracy is a product of humanity and is the best available system, bearing in mind Bahrain's gradual transition towards it, which takes into consideration the aspirations and the makeup of Bahraini society.

3. The West also does not want to see grave violations to human rights in Bahrain, because any violation will not only affect Bahrain but the reputation of its allies as well. Many Western capitals have come under the pressure of international human rights organizations and Arab public opinion especially in light of the Arab Spring. There has also been an increase in political

and media pressure, and from local MPs, which demand that Western Governments take a clear and/or extreme position regarding human rights violations in the country. In summary, Western countries require a reasonable amount of human rights and a control on the violations in any ally country, including Bahrain.

4. The West has a different vision regarding the stability of political systems, especially friendly ones. They believe that the absence of democracy and human rights will eventually lead to instability and without democracy it is difficult to justify their friendly relations with some countries. They also believe that adopting extreme measures will result in disorder and the interference of foreign regional powers. Hence, responding to the legitimate aspirations of the people and respecting human rights is what ultimately guarantees political stability in Bahrain in the long term.

5. It is noticeable that the Western countries' statements adopt harsh language and attempt to apply political pressure on Bahrain, which raises the following question: why put pressure on Bahrain and not on other neighbouring counties that have not even started reforms yet and live in a state of political oppression and lacks public participation in politics? The West seems to believe that a setback in democratization is much worse than an authoritarian state. Moreover, the West also seems to put pressure on their allies as well as their enemies if there is public political movement, regardless of how authoritarian a State is.

6. The strong criticisms of Bahrain focus on human rights issues which have become an important part of international politics and an influential aspect in relations between States. Relations between Western countries, including their allies, are determined by their adherence to their citizens' rights according to international conventions. From this analysis, we can now read the political positions of Western countries and the statements of their foreign ministers and parliaments. Their reactions do not represent animosity towards Bahrain nor are they a call for political instability because in short, this is not in the interest of the West itself.



Ban Ki-moon meet HH Crown Prince in New York



British Foreign Secretary meet HH Crown Prince in London

## Examples of Statements from the West

**The British Foreign Secretary, 21/4/2011:** "I remain concerned at events in Bahrain. Although the immediate situation appears calmer, there continue to be many credible reports of human rights abuses. The arrests of opposition figures, the reports of deaths in custody, allegations of torture and the denial of medical treatment, are extremely troubling. I call on the Government to investigate them fully and transparently. I urge the Bahraini authorities to act in accordance with the law and to meet international standards for the treatment of detainees."

I am also concerned about the Government's move to investigate prominent licensed, political opposition parties – which may lead to their suspension, and by reports that human rights activists have been arrested. The civil rights of peaceful opposition figures and the rights of freedoms of expression and assembly must be respected.

I urge the Government of Bahrain to meet all its human rights obligations and uphold political freedoms, equal access to justice and the rule of law. Events across the Middle East have shown that governments need to respond with reform and not repression if they are to enhance the long-term stability and prosperity of their countries.

I encourage the Bahraini Government and leaders of both communities to show real leadership in promoting tolerance and to demonstrate a shared commitment to the future of Bahrain.

A continuation of the political reform process initiated by King Hamad bin Isa al-Khalifa is essential. It is important that the people of Bahrain are allowed to decide their future themselves. Dialogue is the pathway to meeting the aspirations of all Bahrainis. I urge all sides to engage in it."

**The President of the European Parliament, 28/4/2011:** "I condemn the sentencing to death of the four protesters in Bahrain and I call for their sentences to be reviewed." The European Parliaments calls on the Government of Bahrain and other parties to engage in a meaningful and constructive dialogue without delay or preconditions, in order to bring about reforms"

**Jacob Sylvain, US Department of State, 29/4/2011:** "we are concerned about the hastiness of the trial and the sentences

that were passed. It is important that trials are conducted legitimately and with transparency and credibility. It is investable that all parties will move towards a comprehensive political dialogue. This is the message we sent to the highest authority in the Bahraini Government".

**Bernard Valero, 29/4/2011:** "we call on the Bahraini authorities to not carry out the death sentence. Calm is restored now and it is time for a meaningful dialogue and reconciliation between all concerned parties. This is the only permanent solution for the political crises in Bahrain".

**The British Foreign Office spokesperson, 30/4/2011:** "The UK is concerned by the death sentences given to four Bahrainis. We support Bahrain's right to bring to justice those responsible for the death of two policemen. But it is our longstanding policy to oppose the death penalty in all circumstances. It undermines human dignity, there is no conclusive evidence of its deterrent value, and any miscarriage of justice leading to its imposition is irreversible and irreparable.

We are concerned that emergency laws allow civilians to be tried before military tribunals. We urge the Bahraini authorities to ensure that due process are carefully and transparently followed in all cases and that civil liberties are protected, particularly where severe penalties are proposed. He added "We call on the Government of Bahrain to guarantee its citizens universal human rights and freedoms to which they are entitled, and that it has committed to."

**President Obama, 1/5/2011:** the United States "believes that Bahrain's stability depends upon respect for the universal rights of the people of Bahrain, and a process of meaningful reform that is responsive to the aspirations of all Bahrainis,"

**The High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs, Catherine Ashton, 3/5/2011:** the death sentences will only increase tension in Bahrain and will become an obstacle to national reconciliation. Reconciliation requires engaging in dialogue without preconditions or delays. Also, it requires the implementation of real reform which is the only possible solution in confronting challenges. In accordance with international human rights conventions that Bahrain has signed up to, every person has the right to a fair trial including the right of effective appeal.

**The FDFA, 6/5/2011:** "the FDFA calls on the authorities in Bahrain to commute the death sentences....Switzerland has

already expressed its concern over the tense political situation in Bahrain in a number of bilateral demarches and will continue to call on the Bahraini authorities actively to continue their efforts to engage in a national dialogue".

**The Chairperson of the Liaison Unit of the Arabian Peninsula, Iran, Iraq at the European Commission, Patrika Kosas, 10/5/2011:** " the Commission looks forward to implementation of the comprehensive national dialogue to continue in the process of reform and development adopted by the Kingdom of Bahrain over the past ten years. The project's reform as a model of democracy and peaceful coexistence, which concern to UNHCR in the countries of Persian Gulf"

**British Foreign Office spokesperson, 13/5/2011:** "The UK Government remains deeply concerned by reports of human rights abuses in Bahrain, particularly the widespread arrest of political activists and a large number of doctors and nurses. It is essential that medical personnel can treat their patients free from political interference. Those accused should have access to legal counsel and be tried before independent and impartial courts.

We continue to urge the Government of Bahrain to meet all its human rights obligations and uphold political freedoms, equal access to justice and the rule of law. Those who have been detained should now have full access to the due process of law. The Government of Bahrain should also take swift, concrete steps to carry out the investigations into alleged abuses by Bahraini security forces to which it has already committed.

The announcement by His Majesty King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa, that the State of National Safety in Bahrain will be removed on 1 June, is potentially a welcome step towards achieving longer term stability. We look forward to the practical actions that will support this move. The Bahrain Government's recent announcement on accelerating the investigation into deaths in detention and ensuring accountability for any wrongdoing is also welcome."

**US Department of State, 17/5/2011:** Deputy Secretary Steinberg affirmed the long-standing commitment of the U.S. to a strong partnership with both the people and the Government of Bahrain and stressed the importance of full respect for universal human rights. He urged all parties to pursue a path of reconciliation and comprehensive political dialogue.

**The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Lord Howell of Guildford during discussion of the situation in Bahrain in the House of Lords said that:** "The British Government are aware of allegations about the Bahraini Government's actions towards some Bahraini students studying in the United Kingdom. These are clearly of considerable concern. Our ambassador in Bahrain raised the issue with the Bahraini Minister of Justice on 4 May, saying that it was wrong for students to be punished for exercising a right to peaceful demonstration, as recognised by the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. We will continue to make our concerns clear to the Bahraini authorities."

**US Department of State, 19/5/2011:** State Department has a long history of supporting reform efforts in Bahrain, through direct diplomatic engagement and projects of the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI).

During the past eight years, MEPI has worked strategically with Bahraini partners on a reform agenda focused on political pluralism, women's rights, youth empowerment, labor, civil society strengthening and legal and judicial reform. Engagement around these issues has included opportunities for dialogue and collaboration between government and non-government stakeholders.

MEPI supports the growth and aspirations of Bahrain's peaceful civil society. Recent programming with civil society partners has focused on raising awareness of women's rights at the community level; developing documentary films and public service announcements on domestic violence; conducting trainings on disability rights, strengthening civil society, governance and transparency, human rights and media monitoring, and training for female candidates..

Since September 2009, the American Bar Association, with MEPI funding, has been working with the Ministry of Justice and local bar associations to increase judicial capacity, improve legislative drafting, and promote professionalism among Ministry officials.

## Diplomatic Outreach

The U.S. Embassy has emphasized youth programs, including enhanced collaboration with academic institutions, and exchange and scholarship programs focused on potential young Bahrainis.

Secretary Clinton delivered a keynote address at the Manama Dialogue in Bahrain on December 3, 2010, in which she highlighted "human security" as one of four main principles critical to maintaining Gulf security. She defined human security as including participatory governance, freedom of expression, free access to education and employment, and women's empowerment. While in Manama, the Secretary also held a town hall meeting to directly engage with civil society and youth.

DRL Deputy Assistant Secretary Kathy Fitzpatrick visited Bahrain on January 11 to engage the Government of Bahrain and advocate for reforms, including on its incarceration policies, commitment to transparent judicial proceedings, and civil society development.

Assistant Secretary Feltman has visited Bahrain five times since demonstrations began in February to address unrest and political reform.

The State Department has expressed deep concern about the detention of civil society leaders and opposition politicians, as well as Bahraini moves to clamp down on opposition political activities and independent media. Secretary Clinton issued a statement on March 19 in support of political reform in Bahrain, saying "our goal is a credible political process that

can address the legitimate aspirations of all the people of Bahrain."

Deputy Secretary Steinberg visited Bahrain May 17 and affirmed the long-standing commitment of the United States to a strong partnership with both the people and government of Bahrain and stressed the importance of full respect for universal human rights. He urged all parties to pursue a path of reconciliation and comprehensive political dialogue.

**President Obama, 22/5/2011:** "we have insisted publicly and privately that mass arrests and brute force are at odds with the universal rights of Bahrain's citizens, and will not make legitimate calls for reform go away.

The only way forward is for the government and opposition to engage in a dialogue, and you can't have a real dialogue when parts of the peaceful opposition are in jail. The government must create the conditions for dialogue, and the opposition must participate to forge a just future for all Bahrainis"

**Council of the European Union, 23/5/2011:** "The European Union strongly encourages Bahrain to ensure full respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, including freedom of expression, and accountability regarding allegations of human rights violations including reported cases of torture and ill-treatment.

The EU also encourages fair and transparent administration of justice including in cases involving charges against medical professionals. Access for independent observers to ongoing legal proceedings should be allowed.

The EU welcomes the decree issued by King Hamad of Bahrain, according to which the state of emergency will be lifted on 1 June. We look forward to the practical actions which will support this move.

The EU once again urges all parties to engage rapidly in meaningful dialogue with a view to bringing about reforms which offer real prospects for successfully addressing the country's challenges."

**French Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesperson, 24/5/2011:** "France, like its European partners, is resolutely opposed to the death penalty everywhere and under all circumstances. I remind you that we had, April 24, denounced the death sentence at trial of several people following the events of recent weeks have shocked and saddened Bahrain.

We call on the Bahraini authorities not to apply this sentence upheld on appeal by a military court against two Bahraini nationals.

It is time to seek ways of a sincere dialogue between the parties and reconciliation, the only lasting solution to the political crisis in Bahrain. Respect for fundamental freedoms and the fair administration of justice and transparency are essential to carry out such a process".

**British Foreign Secretary William Hague after meeting the Crown Prince, 26/5/2011:** "The Crown Prince and I had a constructive meeting. I made clear the UK's strong concern over the recent arrests of protestors and medical staff and the nature of the charges brought against them. I also expressed

my belief that responding to the legitimate aspirations of Bahrain's people – through reform not repression - was the best way to guarantee stability. We agreed on the need for a long term political solution in Bahrain and I welcomed the role the Crown Prince intends to play in building a dialogue. I call on the Government of Bahrain to create the conditions under which this can take place and on all sides, including opposition groupings, to engage."

**Ban Ki-moon 3/6/2011,** welcomed the King's call for national dialogue and called on all parties to participate in it in order to reach general reconciliation. This is in order to benefit the Bahraini society and guarantee stability, security and progress.

**Russian foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov 7/6/2011:** "There's no use in adopting new resolutions that will reflect the position of one of the parties to these internal controversies," This will bluntly contradict the UN principles. Although the developments in Bahrain don't attract attention at first sight, they are nonetheless quite serious. We think reliance should be looked for in the principles of national reconciliation and concord and in a fruitful role played by neighbouring states."

**White House statement after meeting the Crown Prince, 7/6/2011:** The President met today and had a productive discussion with His Highness Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa, Crown Prince of Bahrain, He also expressed strong support for the Crown Prince's ongoing efforts to initiate the national dialogue and said that both the opposition and the government must compromise to forge a just future for all Bahrainis. the President emphasized the importance of following through on the government's commitment to ensuring that those responsible for human rights abuses will be held accountable

**British Foreign Secretary William Hague, 7/6/2011:** "We are also concerned about developments in Bahrain, particularly the arrest and trial of a large number of politicians, doctors and nurses and allegations of torture. I raised our concern and the need for the Government to meet all its human rights obligations when I saw the Crown Prince of Bahrain last month. I also emphasised the need for a long-term political solution that builds bridges between the different religious communities. I welcome the lifting of the State of National Safety on 1 June and the announcement by The King of Bahrain that a comprehensive and inclusive National Dialogue will start on 1 July. Urgent dialogue on genuine political reform is the only way to address the legitimate concerns of the Bahraini people and ensure long-term stability."

**US Secretary of State after meeting with the Crown Prince, 7/6/2011:** "it is very significant to have these discussions, to hear directly from the Crown Prince about the plans that Bahrain is pursuing with respect to dealing with the issues that it currently is considering at home, and to create the conditions for political and economic reform.

Bahrain is a partner, and a very important one, to the United States, and we are supportive of a national dialogue and the kinds of important work that the Crown Prince has been doing in his nation, and we look forward to it continuing."

# Bahrain is Committed to Dialogue and Human Rights

The current setback in the reform project and the deterioration of Bahrain's image abroad due to human rights violations has disappointed everyone, including the King and the Crown Prince. The crisis was the result of dominant extremist discourse, sectarian feelings and the influence of the demonstrators on the political decisions. The King and the Crown Prince had attempted to initiate dialogue as a solution to the problem in order to curb feelings on the street and achieve stability and the rule of law with minimal losses. Unfortunately, this dialogue did not succeed due to the tense atmosphere in the country and widespread sectarian feelings.

It is clear that the Government has realized the faults and negative effects in applying security measures, which raised concerns among Bahrain's friends abroad. Both the King and the Crown prince have attempted to restore order and solve existing problems by embarking on a series of corrective steps including affirming the rule of law, confronting violations, and returning once again to the reform project. It also include promoting human rights and fundamental freedoms and initiating national dialogue as a crucial step towards solving the country's political crisis.

This was also apparent in the statements of the political leadership and several officials. We have recently witnessed the beginnings of corrective measures on the ground, which will hopefully continue and create a favourable environment for national reconciliation. The following are excerpts from the statements made by the officials:

His Majesty the King, 31/5/2011: 'we should only pause at what we have recently been through to learn lessons from it. The reform project was first initiated on the basis of a historical consensus on the National Action Charter where Bahraini citizens decided to start a new chapter in their history. This included a comprehensive modernization program and attention to providing a dignified living for all, whilst promoting public representation and participation in decision-making and developing the present and future for generations of Bahrainis. Reform is the project that we have not and will not flinch from; it is the faith and the will between us and the people. Who does not want a more efficient government performance? Who does not want a more effective legislative representation? Or political associations and civil society groups that work in the framework of national unity and the rule of law? Anyone who rejects this does not believe in development and will be unable to stop the natural progress of people. Dialogue is a strategic choice in order to reach solutions. We call upon both the Legislative and Executive authorities to call for a national reconciliation dialogue regarding the ideal situation for the Kingdom of Bahrain and to take all the necessary procedures to prepare for this comprehensive and serious dialogue without



preconditions. Dialogue should start in July and everyone should participate in order to push reform forward and to achieve more development in all fields as well as participating in strengthening the foundations of the reform project'.

The Prime Minister Khalifa bin Salman, 5/6/2011: called upon all parties to participate positively in the Kings' comprehensive national dialogue and to present their proposals for the country's interest. He also encouraged all parties to persevere in the dialogue and work hard into making it a success because it is the safe way out of the crisis and will lay the foundation for the new period.



His Highness the Crown Prince, after his meeting with the British Foreign Secretary on 25/05/2011, stated that: (there is great activity to deal comprehensively with issues of fundamental concern at the national and international levels, as our goal is to build on the historical process of development and reform, which is clear and evident when we look at it from a wide regional perspective. The Kingdom of Bahrain is fully committed to the continuing reform within the framework of the reform project led by His Majesty the King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa. The progress in this project depends on reconciliation, stability, sustainability and responsibility, coupled with the development of realistic goals,

which are achievable and acceptable to all Bahrainis. Bahrain was able to overcome the difficulties in the past, and will be able to do that again as a united country under the leadership of His Majesty the King. The unfortunate events that took place were different in nature, and came as a result of rejection by one party of the initiative of His Majesty the King to begin a comprehensive national dialogue, which I was honoured and entrusted by His Majesty the King to carry out. This rejection affected the Bahraini society, caused unacceptable polarization, and gave way for the militants to create turmoil and violence, which necessitated the application of the National Safety Law to prevent escalation of the situation and the occurrence of clashes that divide the community).

**The Crown Prince after his meeting with the British Foreign Secretary, 25/5/2011:** "I welcome the support of President Obama and his understanding with regards to the national dialogue. I also welcome his comments on the required conditions for the success of the dialogue. I completely share the President's views that international rights treaties should be respected and that Bahrain should continue its serious reform process, which is a priority in the Kingdom. The United States is a historical ally of a country which is about to engage in new phase of reform. Bahrain's continued commitment to the reform project which was initiated by the King a decade ago will not change. The announcements made by various political parties in the Kingdom welcoming dialogue is an important indicator that democratic development in Bahrain is continuing. However, this development must go hand in hand with stability and must be based on consensus. The reform process is not an easy and will face many obstacles, including tackling the issues that divided the Bahraini society and led to society polarization. Bahrain is learning lessons from the recent events, and has undertaken steps to guarantee a better future; we have decided to go forward with more reforms".

**The Crown Prince, 4/6/2011:** His Royal Highness the Crown Prince affirmed that Bahrain is steadily moving towards a new era due to the efforts to enhance the democratic gains of the country, which are continuing through the reform project led by His Majesty King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa. In a meeting with the SG of the UN, Ban Ki-moon on 3 June 2011, His Royal Highness also underlined the commitment of the Kingdom of Bahrain to a comprehensive national dialogue called for by His Majesty the King to reach a consensus among all segments of society through democratic bodies. His Royal Highness added that this would reinforce national unity and maintain stability. His Royal Highness also emphasized the solid belief and commitment of the Kingdom of Bahrain to human rights principles and respect for basic freedoms, such as those of assembly and opinion within the framework of legitimacy, law and the constitution.

**The Crown Prince 4/6/2011:** "The National Dialogue will be comprehensive, serious and without preconditions. I welcome the broad political support and the willingness of all to engage in this process. I believe it is essential that we embark on an inclusive and open dialogue which recognizes all viewpoints and is developed along the lines of a broad national consensus for its results to be sustainable. We have a strong economic framework in place, and with further political and social reforms developed through dialogue, I believe we must look to the future with confidence."

**After meeting the President of the United States, the Crown Prince stressed on 7/6/2011** that "Obama's support and understanding regarding Bahrain's forthcoming national dialogue was most welcome, as were his comments on the circumstances required to ensure its success".

The Crown Prince also said that he shared the President's "outlook concerning respect for universal rights and the continuation of Bahrain's process of meaningful reform, which is a fundamental priority for the Kingdom." He added that Bahrain's commitment to reform "remains steadfast": "His Majesty has already made clear that a national dialogue will start next month and that it will be serious and without pre-conditions. Most significantly, Bahrain's leading political groups have welcomed dialogue and are committed to joining this process; providing a critical indication, from all sides of the political spectrum, that the country's continued democratic development should be underpinned by stability and driven by consensus."

**The Crown Prince after meeting with Secretary of State Hilary Clinton, 7/6/2011:** "It is a great pleasure to be here. I am honoured to be here as a representative of my country during this challenging time. It is a great test, but also a great opportunity to lead the nation forward. We are committed to reform in the political and economic areas, and I reaffirm our position to work with the US to achieve that."

**The Crown Prince, 8/6/2011:** "in order to guarantee the success of dialogue, both the participation and the agreement of all parties



is required, in addition to the determination of all Bahraini people to remain united and moderate".

**His Excellency the Foreign Minister Sheikh Khalid bin Ahmed Al-Khalifa, in an interview with PBS News Hour:** "Bahrain is currently considering the release of some detainees. Our Government is not looking for a government-opposition dialogue, we are instead working towards a government that aims for a comprehensive reconciliation for our people." The Minister also commented on the statements made by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, in which she described the security measures in Bahrain as harsh and she called for investigation by international institutions: "we pay attention to everything been said, and do not claim that these statements are untrue. Undoubtedly, we see and hear many exaggerations, but we are not angels, and are trying to see the bigger picture. If there had been any mistakes,



## Ministry of Interior Holds its Employees Accountable

On 2 June 2001, the Assistance Undersecretary for Legal Affairs in the Interior Ministry said that the strategy of the Ministry is to strongly adhere to the law and the Constitution. He added that the Ministry works under a number of guidelines and procedures, which guarantee the non-occurrence of breaches against detainees. In the unlikely case of any violations, certain measures are to be taken as the Ministry is keen to investigate any violations committed by any of its members in detention centres or in the street, considering this a legal obligation.

The Assistant also stated that so far in 2011, 20 cases have been investigated, covering complaints and allegations against the police for ill-treatment and physical assaults. Four of these cases were referred to criminal trials; 12 are pending awaiting forensic reports or due to the failure of some detainees to turn up for questioning. Five cases have been frozen due to insufficient evidence.

He added that a case was previously investigated by the Ministry of Interiors' Military Prosecutor regarding the death of one detainee in April 2011, where the guards and officials of the detention centre were all interrogated, and two were found guilty. The death of two other detainees was also investigated and the medical records of one of them proved that the cause of death was sickle cell anaemia. Investigations of recent deaths are still continuing.

we will ensure that they are duly corrected".

**His Excellency the Foreign Minister, 1/6/2011:** "there is a public will for change and extensive Government efforts to deal with the fundamental issues concerning our nation. The aim of the Kingdom of Bahrain is to build upon previous reforms and development. Bahrain is wholly committed to continuing reforms in the context of the wider reform project, and will not go back on it".

**His Excellency the Foreign Minister, 2/6/20011,** said that Bahrain is committed to the national dialogue announced by His Majesty the King and to international human rights standards. He added that Bahrain aims to implement such standards, encouraged the private sector to reinstate dismissed workers, formed a ministerial complaints committee to investigate redundancy cases and released many accused of various cases. He also affirmed that Bahrain is willing to develop its democratic experience, stressing at the same time that national dialogue in the context of democratic institutions is enough to fulfill citizens' aspirations. He also added that Bahrain is working to calm sectarian tensions in order to prepare for national dialogue. The Minister also stressed that Bahrain will continue to promote human rights, and is currently cooperating with all human rights institutions as it is committed to international human rights conventions".

**The Minister of Justice in a press interview, 2 June 2011:** "His Majesty the King desires that all Bahrainis participate positively and effectively in the dialogue, and that recent events will not affect mutual relations between Bahrainis and the ways in which they debate with each other. Dialogue should not be hijacked by inciting people to take to the streets as this can only lead to social polarization. Everyone has felt the pain of recent events and we do not want to go back to it. We would also like to stress that the doors are still open for a dialogue which is based on

## The NIHR Calls for a Speedy Decision on Suspension and Redundancy Cases

On 9 June 2011, the National Institution for Human Rights (NIHR) urged both private and public sectors to reach quick decisions on the cases of individuals suspended or dismissed.

NIHR stressed the importance of respecting the constitutional rights of all employees in both private and public sectors, adding that legal measures should be taken to determine their legal position and that dismissal cases should be looked into. NIHR believes that the dismissal of employees contradicts official guidelines regarding national dialogue and preparations for an appropriate environment.

national consensus. We should concentrate on how we want to see Bahrain after this crisis and in the coming phase we will witness major changes and wide and transparent debates which will provide an opportunity for the people to end their suffering and emerge with a more mature experience".

**The Minister of Justice, 2 June 2011:** The Ministry of Justice and Islamic Affairs announced a month before the speech of the US President that it would rebuild places of worship as part of its development plan: "this is not a reaction to international statements. We are fully aware of our country's needs, including the need to establish places of worship appropriately".

**Deputy Prime Minister Jawad bin Salem Al-Areed and the Chairman of the Committee formed to consider the events that have occurred since 14 February 2011 (on 8/6/2011):** the committee meetings will continue during the next period in order to ascertain the reasons and circumstances which resulted in the deaths of a number of citizens and residents during recent events.

**The Minister of Labour, 11/5/2011:** "the door is open for anyone who has evidence proving his/her dismissal to be arbitrary, and the Complaints Committee is following dismissal cases which have currently been registered with the Ministry. Many companies have already formed their own committees to reinvestigate and verify the legal procedures of dismissals, and have allowed their employees the right to file complaints according to the law. The Ministry expects more companies to reconsider their dismissal procedures, especially those which have violated regulations, and to reinstate individuals who were unfairly made redundant. During the upcoming period, the Committee will verify companies' documents and the procedures, which led to their dismissal



### The Reinstatement of 571 Employees

On 9 June 2011, the Verification Committee reinstated 571 employees back to their jobs due to the lack of legal evidence for sacking them. The Committee has also been directed to quickly scrutinize remaining cases, to ensure the legality of their dismissals, and then to submit a report as soon as possible.



decisions. What is most important for the Committee is to provide all possible legal guarantees for those dismissed and not to violate their rights, which are laid out in the Kingdom's law and regulations".

**The Minister of Labour, 26/5/2011** affirmed that unemployment insurance will be paid out to anyone proven to be arbitrarily dismissed during the regrettable events. He added that all companies are in the process of revising their procedures with the coordination of the newly formed Committee. He noted that mistakes were made in this regard which can be corrected.

**The Ministry of Municipalities 25/5/2011:** in response to published articles on the demolition of some worship premises, the Ministry affirmed that demolishing unlicensed constructions was part of the Ministry's responsibility to ensure that all buildings are in line with development regulations. The Ministry strongly denies causing any unnecessary damage, adding that the demolitions were conducted in order to organise streets and neighbourhoods, to improve the appearance of the area and to prevent the hindering of some infrastructure projects. The Ministry also denied any claims that it was targeting places of worship, stressing that such allegations are untrue and stir public opinion. The Ministry said that only the unlicensed parts of the places of worship were removed and that the Ministry has photographs and documents to prove this.

### Ministry of Education: Conditional Reinstatement of Scholarships

On 25 May 2011, the Minister of Education Dr. Majed Al Nuaimi said that "the Ministry had previously discontinued a number of scholarships inside the country and abroad for their involvement in anti-government protests and violating the terms of their scholarships. It was made clear to the Ministry from the many letters it received from the students' parents that they would be willing to sign a pledge promising never to get involved again in similar activities. The Ministry decided to re-pay the university tuition fees for the students and oblige them to sign a pledge vowing to refrain from any activity that might damage the reputation of Bahrain. All students abroad were made to report to the Cultural Attaché in their country of study in order to sign the pledge before receiving their monthly stipend. As for students inside Bahrain, they should report to the Ministry with their parents for the same reason. If any student is proven to be involved in such activities in the future, his/her scholarship will be immediately cancelled and he/she will be obliged to pay back all the expenses paid by the Ministry.

## Correcting Human Rights Wrongs

During political crisis many human rights violations occur and we as human rights activists are primarily concerned with these abuses. On the other hand, political mistakes represent debatable theoretical approaches whereas violating human rights is condemned by human rights institutions and Bahraini national laws.

Clear violations have taken place by both sides during recent events in Bahrain namely; the opposition and the authorities. What is important now is to admit this fact and take the necessary steps to correct the situation. However, revising and correcting past mistakes will be a difficult task if the situation on the ground continues to be tense. It is in the interest of Bahrain for every party to assess its position and learn from past mistakes instead of concentrating on highlighting their opponent's faults. The Government has admitted that regrettable violations took place on many occasions, including the deaths of a number of citizens in custody, which resulted in the referral of some employees from the Ministry of Interior to the Military Court for investigation.

Recent human rights violations include: The unfair dismissal of workers for their participation in the political protests and their absence from work. The number of dismissed workers has reached nearly two thousands.

The Bahrain Workers' Union and the International Labour Organization condemned this as an unjustified and arbitrary action which contradicts national laws and Bahrain's international commitments. The Minister of Labour admitted that mistakes took place due to the rush in dismissing hundreds of workers in the private sector, and demanded their immediate reinstatement.

The cessation of many overseas scholarships was a wrong decision, which has negatively affected Bahrain's reputation and was condemned by many human rights organizations. Even if the students had really violated the terms of the scholarship by participating in demonstrations, it is still difficult to justify the decision from a human rights perspective. The Minister of Education requested the restoration of some scholarships and we hope this takes place immediately and applies to all.

The destruction of religious institutions. Even if these buildings were erected without permission, the timing and manner of demolishing them was unacceptable. Moreover, this was seen by the international community as targeting religious freedoms and places of worship, whilst Bahrain has always been well known for its religious tolerance.

There are other violations

regarding detention, ill-treatment and media discourse. Human rights defenders are hoping that these violations will be addressed and that the Government will take necessary measures to prevent their recurrence.

On 18 June 2011 and in a commendable step, the Ministry of Social Development admitted that it is taking allegations of human rights violations very seriously, and added that necessary measures were being taken to investigate them.

With regards to the Bahraini opposition, some of its members also committed some violations including:

- Running over security men, taking some of them hostage and attacking foreign workers, which resulted in some deaths.
- Inciting hatred and justifying violence by some preachers.
- Fabricating stories of human rights violations.
- Assaulting public and private properties including a number of schools and universities, blocking roads and hindering the work of the Sulaimaniya Hospital.

We hope that we can start a new phase of respecting human rights, whilst learning from past mistakes, putting into place new mechanisms, and implementing related legislations in order to prevent the recurrence of similar violations.

## BHRM: The King's Speech Determines State Strategy and the Reform Project is Bahrain's Capital

The President of the BHRM Hasan Moosa Shafaei praised the King's speech given on 31 May 2011, in which he called for national dialogue asserting that this speech has paved the way for Bahrain to recover politically and socially, which would guarantee development, freedom and prosperity.

In a statement issued on 1 June 2011, the BHRM said that the King's speech has highlighted the most important issues concerning local, regional and international opinions. It also stressed some strategic issues which can be summarised in five basic points:

**1. Engaging in a national dialogue that includes various political parties in the country.** This means that he is keen to involve all political and social segments and emphasizes the fact that dialogue is the best way to deal with problems in order to achieve optimum results.

**2. Continuing the comprehensive reform process.** Despite concerns that the achievements of the past years have been undermined, the King reaffirmed that reform is the only choice left for Bahrain. He said: "Reform is the project that we have not and will not flinch from; it is the faith and the will between us and the people."

**3. Promoting social cohesion, which has been badly affected by recent events.** The King stressed the role of journalists in filling this social gap, creating a national unified public opinion and restoring trust by dealing wisely with controversial issues. According to the King, a free and integral press "is the foundation of democratic development and a positive factor in promoting social cohesion and unity".

**4. Guaranteeing public freedoms, in particular the freedom of press.** There are concerns that the tensions created by recent events could result

in a setback in the freedom of the press. The King stressed his continued commitment to "promote freedom of opinion and expression in the context of political, cultural and intellectual diversity". He added: "we made it clear to all journalists in the Kingdom of Bahrain that their freedoms and rights are protected and that no one will be harmed for expressing their peaceful and civilised opinion within the rule of law".

**5. Emphasizing the role of constitutional institutions in developing political life.** This is made possible through their preparation for national dialogue, legislative elections and more active public representation as well as the necessary development of democratic life through the democratic institutions.

Finally, Shafaei said that Bahrain needs to transform the King's speech into practical programmes by controlling official, public and oppositional behaviours according to the law, national principles and the mutual interests, which national dialogue will lay the ground for. He also said it was necessary to prepare the appropriate atmosphere in order for the dialogue to achieve its desired goals of political security, social stability and the removal of tensions, sectarian split, vengeance and malicious political bickering.

On 16 June 2011, the BHRM issued another statement stressing that the national dialogue is the safest way out of the crisis and will serve the interests of all with minimal losses. The statement added that there is an urgent need for social and political reconciliation as well as preparing an appropriate environment in order to pave the way for dialogue. This includes the need for a more efficient and transparent Government and Legislative Authority,

which can only be achieved by respecting the rule of law, promoting national unity, respecting human rights and promoting the values of justice and equality.

The statement also urged all political parties to overcome obstacles, prepare for dialogue and not to harbour sectarian feelings. It also called on the media to protect national dialogue and refrain from emphasizing sectarian affiliations, which will only hinder reform and promote social division. The use of a unifying national rhetoric is essential because Bahrain can only be developed through the participation of its two main social segments the Sunni and Shia.

The President of the BHRM expressed his deep regret over the personalization of the crisis and the unjustified attack on the opponents. He pointed to the fact that Bahrain needs social peace and that personal attack on individuals, families or groups, will only serve Bahrain's enemies. He continued by saying that the media should at this time promote the culture of forgiveness, adhere to the articles of the Publication Law and refrain from publishing any articles which may have negative effects.

The statement also praised the Government's recent measures, which included the reinstatement of a number of dismissed workers and saw it as a step in the right direction. The statement also added that it is important to continue taking similar steps so that dialogue is not delayed and all obstacles are removed.

Finally, Shafaei said that the reform project is Bahrain's biggest asset and undermining its achievements is a major loss for all Bahrainis including all political parties who aspire for a free, developed and dignified Bahrain.

## BHRM Activities

During the last two months (May and June 2011), the President of the Bahrain Human Rights Monitor Hasan Moossa Shafeai met several Bahraini officials, ministers, political activists, journalists, figures from political societies as well as human rights activists.

Shafeai met the Foreign Minister Sheikh Khalid bin Mohammed Al Khalifa, the Minister of Interior Sheikh Rashed Bin Abdulla Al- Khalifa and Dr. Fatima Al Balooshi the Minister for Human Rights and Social Development. He also met with the Under-Secretaries of Foreign Affairs Abdulla Abdullatif and Hamad Al Amir, Director of the Legal Affairs Directorate Major Rashed Mohamed Bu Najma. During the meetings many issues were discussed including recent human rights developments, matters of concern with regards to human rights and Bahrain's commitments to human rights and the relations with international human rights organizations. Shafeai was briefed on cases of human rights violations in Bahrain, during which they all stressed Bahrain's commitment to respect human rights.

Shafeai also met both the Secretary General of Al-Wefaq Society Sheikh Ali Salman and the Chairman of the National Unity Assembly Dr. Abdu Latif Al Mahmood where they discussed several issues regarding the possibility

of national dialogue, social cohesion, confronting the incitement resultant from sectarian discourses and stressed the importance of exerting all efforts in order to promote social unity. Shafeai urged them to try their best to solve the political crisis in a way that will satisfy all parties and achieve political and social stability.

The President of the BHRM also met the Chairman of Foreign Affairs Committee, Dr. Salah Ali and discussed with him the important role that the legislative institutions play in supervising the Executive Authority's commitment to human rights in light of allegations of violations. He also met officials from the Information Affairs Authority including Sheikh Abdulaziz bin Mubark Al Khalifa and Sheikh Abdulla bin Ahmad Al Khalifa. Shafeai also met the Editor in Chief of al-Bilad newspaper Mo'nes Almurdi and the Acting Editorial Manager Ahmed Ibrahim. During the meeting many issues were discussed including the role played by the national media in fostering harmony and forgiveness, bridging social divides, and preventing the publication of divisive material as well as discussing foreign concerns over media freedom in Bahrain.

Moreover, the President of the BHRM participated in two debates on human rights on Al Hurra TV channel on 8 June 2011 and on ANB on 3 June 2011 with the participation of MP Latifa Al Qaood and member of the Shura Council Dr. Salah Ali.



with Editor in Chief Moanes Al Mardi



interview with Alhurra



Shafeai meets Dr. Fatima Al Balooshi



With Under Secretary Abdulla Abdullatif



with Dr. A. Latif Al Mahmood



with Dr. Salah Ali



With the Director of Legal Affairs  
Directorate Major Rashed Bu Najma



interview with ANB