

# Bahrain Monitor

A Monthly Newsletter on the Human Rights Situation in Bahrain



*Bahrain Human Rights Monitor*

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Issue 38 • April 2013

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## Crisis & Post crisis Media in Bahrain

The media coverage in Bahrain today is an extension of positions taken during the recent crisis in the country. As such one should speak of 'medias' not 'media', which in this case can be divided into two kinds which target separate audiences. It is a 'crisis media' because since the recent troubles in the country, it has been infected by sectarianism, marginalization, accusations and the harassment of journalists.

Media coverage in Bahrain also contains a considerable amount of stereotyping, where the opponent (whether from the opposition or the loyalist camp) is boycotted or ignored in order to contain their dangerous influence on an already sectarianized and politicised mass. This media can also be described as tense, in a state of constant attack rather than defence, and bent on fabricating lies and stories in a way which resonates with the emotions and sectarian affiliations of its audience. As such, it demonizes the 'other' and spreads suspicion and fear about the threats they pose on a group's interests.

The current media in Bahrain is a media in a state of war; its aim is to mobilise and incite hatred and extremism against an imaginary enemy. The influence of such a media is limited to its followers, as it feeds into their deep-rooted fears and builds barriers between different sects and groups which are difficult to overcome.

Unfortunately, we do not have a national media in Bahrain. What we have instead is a media that moves without a common point of reference or law and without any vision for the future, as it is too preoccupied with sectarian wars. Even before the crisis, Bahrain had lacked a modern press law, and at present this is not a priority, as all parties are engrossed in the on-going political war. The kind of media produced by political battles, though seemingly necessary during periods of crisis, will nonetheless result in long-term damage to Bahrain's culture and society.

So in fact, there is no post-crisis media on the horizon in Bahrain, as political opponents are too embroiled in political battles to be able to contemplate a different future for Bahraini media. Moreover, journalists have also become victims of the crisis in the same way that the people have become victims of a sectarianized media.

Who could possibly restore hope or bring these opponents together? Who could monitor, correct and guide the course of political and sectarian discourses? The current 'crisis media' is neither objective nor professional, and could not care less about building and investing in the future or human rights. Bahrain desperately needs a 'post-crisis media' which respects human rights and dignity; a media that promotes national unity, equality, justice and forgiveness.

Currently there is no moderate media in Bahrain, and this is a dangerous indication of the country's political crisis. Only when a moderate media is born, are we on the right path towards burying schisms and the crisis together.

## No Democracy without Human Rights Towards Reforms and Change in Bahrain

**In 1993, the Declaration and Programme of Action issued by the International Conference on Human Rights recognised the interdependence and mutually reinforcing relationship between democracy, development and human rights.**

Democracy and human rights are interdependent and reinforce one another. There can be no democracy without respecting the fundamental rights of citizens in accordance to International human rights standards. An increase in human rights violations undermines democracy.

There is also a strong connection between human rights and the rule of law; and these two principles are the main components of democracy. If a country disrespects the rule of law, this will lead to the violation of the fundamental rights of its citizens. Respecting the rule of law is a sign of respect for the will of the people. Moreover, abiding by the law prevents discrimination, prejudice, totalitarianism and the misuse of power.

Currently, Bahrain is at a crossroad and the people are relying on the national dialogue to rebuild a consensual democratic political system. Political parties should understand that building a stable political system based on justice, equality and public participation, will be impossible without eliminating sectarianism, violence and extremism.

Bahrain will not be able to build its own political system with the continual misuse of power, economic and political corruption, impunity and restriction of freedoms.

The rule of law, human rights

and democracy are intertwined and the absence of one will prevent the others from taking place. It is not possible to respect human rights without respecting the rule of law. Human rights violations contradict the essence of democracy and such violations are dealt with swiftly in democratic countries.

Bahrain faces two challenges. The first is finding a way to end the current political crisis through the initiation of a successful dialogue. The second challenge is building a political system that promotes democracy. Both challenges are difficult to overcome but there is hope that they can be achieved in the foreseeable future.

The path to achieving this is difficult and complicated but we all know that democracy cannot be built in one night. It is a long and continual process that needs time to become rooted in the system. It also requires investments, institutional work, collective efforts and awareness by social and political parties.

According to the reports of the OHCHR which was issued in December 2012, and was entitled 'a study on the common challenges facing states in their efforts to secure democracy and the rule of law from a human rights perspective': 'states should strive to respect the principles of the rule of law, in particular, the separation of powers, the independence of the judiciary,

the independence and accountability of Parliament and institutional checks and balances, as guarantors of protection against impunity, corruption and abuse of power'.

The report also added that 'democracy, development and human rights have important conceptual and practical affinities. The suppression of impediments to participation in public life and decision-making, reductions in income disparities, improved access to economic opportunities and social safety nets are markers of a healthy democracy'.

The report also stressed that 'all components of civil society must be able to exercise their right to participate in decision-making structures and mechanisms and to be actively involved in democratization processes. Also, incitement to hatred, discrimination or intolerance on any ground is a threat to democracy and should be appropriately countered. Moreover, national security and counter-terrorism strategies must not serve as pretexts to undermine democracy, human rights and the rule of law'.

It is time for Bahrain to start reforms and make changes in order to restore stability. Long term solutions are needed and all political parties should think about the future and the interest of the public. They should stop lingering on the past and avoid thinking about factional interests.

## Restoring Hope

**Hasan Moosa Shafaei**

When he stayed away from the political arena, this was seen as an indication of a political and human rights crisis in the country. But when he re-entered the scene after two years, hope was restored. This sums up what can be said about the appointment of the Crown Prince Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa as First Deputy Prime Minister.

The opposition was optimistic and welcomed this step and put forward a number of serious issues for him to resolve. Arab and Western capitals, as well as International human rights figures and bodies welcomed this step, and saw in it a potential solution which can help take Bahrain out of its current crisis along the road towards stability, democracy and peace. It is clear that even ordinary citizens are optimistic and see the Crown Prince as a popular, humble and bold figure, who is capable of making difficult decisions and tackling contentious issues with due transparency .

Both the opposition and the loyalists want Bahrain to come to its senses, and return to its happiness and tolerance, whilst moving swiftly towards the future by making the necessary decisions for overcoming the current phase. Political and human rights issues have become very much intertwined, to the extent that it is difficult to tackle one and ignore the other. For this reason, one can find among the politicians and human rights activists in Bahrain, shared hopes and aspirations towards equality, justice, freedom, democracy and prosperity.

It is evident that the Crown Prince is aware of the complexity and magnitude of the problem. He does not want to disappoint the people of Bahrain or the

friends abroad, and would like to prove that he is able to restore peace and stability, and create a new momentum for serious and effective reforms. The Crown Prince had previously stated in the media that the pace of past reforms had been slow, and that their benefits failed to reach all citizens.

Currently, everyone hopes that the Crown Prince will be able to address the cumulative problems in the country. In his letter to the King on 11 March 2011, he highlighted the problems that Bahrain has experienced during the last two years. He also vowed to work towards making Bahrain a model of tolerance and cohesion through the respect of diversity, democracy and fundamental freedoms. This is in addition to promoting a concept of citizenship based on duties and obligations, equality, equal opportunities and promoting economic development and stability. During the first session of the Council of Ministers, he talked about the importance of putting forward a political programme that suits the requirements of the modern age and satisfies the will of the Bahraini people. He also stressed the importance of overcoming all challenges with the participation of all Bahrainis without any exception, marginalization or discrimination.

Today, Bahrain needs a political solution which could be achieved through dialogue and consensus.

National dialogue currently faces many challenges which necessitate the direct involvement of the Crown Prince. A political solution will reduce most, if not all of the security tensions in the country. No economy can develop during political and security crisis nor can social divisions be tackled apart from the political issue. All the current problems are strongly intertwined and can mainly be attributed to political disagreements between various parties. Addressing the political issue is a priority, without which, Bahrainis



will find it very difficult to heal their wounds and return to normality.

The citizens are attaching their hopes on the Crown Prince, though the current situation requires solutions that could be painful to everyone. These solutions should be consensual and would require compromises, trust and selflessness among political parties in the interest of a stable and prosperous Bahrain. The tense situation in the region requires adopting fast initiatives in order to protect the country and enable it to confront foreign challenges.

## Disappointment over the Outcome of the Visit by HRW

**Human Rights Watch's (HRW) visit to Bahrain in February 2013 and its concluding statement sparked several reactions from the Government, media, Parliament and civil society organisations. The content and language of the statement surprised many and triggered harsh criticisms including calls to refrain from cooperating with HRW and holding those who invited it into the country accountable. What was said to cause this level of disappointment and what pushed some to suggest that HRW officials should not be allowed to enter Bahrain?**

### HRW's statement

On 28 February 2013, HRW issued a statement regarding its delegation's visit to Bahrain which lasted for five days. During that visit, HRW was allowed to meet officials, civil society activists and some prisoners in Jo Prison. The statement strongly criticised what it called Bahrain's failure to fulfil its commitments towards dealing with human rights violations such as:

- Failing to take any steps regarding accountability especially concerning officials.
- Sentencing seven prisoners to life. The HRW also demanded the issuing of a general amnesty regarding all cases including those that have gone through the Court of Cassation.
- HRW also criticised the draft association law as well as the Ministry of Social Development stating that 'Fatima al Balushi is pushing a new law designed to cripple anything resembling an independent civil society, as if her authoritarian powers under the current NGO law are not bad enough, she's now put forward a law that will give her unmitigated and arbitrary control over whether a group can even register as a legal organization.'
- The excessive and unlawful use of tear gas against the protesters.
- The detention of human rights activists and considering their activities, which HRW regards as freedom of expression, as inciting to violence.

The authorities in Bahrain objected to

two main issues:

First: the statement failed to mention the positive efforts made with regards to human rights apart from praising the cooperation of the Ministry of Human Rights in facilitating the delegation's visit to Bahrain. It also pointed to the fact that 'Bahraini authorities had facilitated open and frank meetings with government officials'.

Second- the language used in the statement was described as blunt as in: 'all the talk of national dialogue and reform mean nothing so long as the country's most prominent human rights and political activists remain unjustly imprisoned while officials responsible for torture and murder remain in their positions'. Or in:

'If Bahraini officials believe that an activist is inciting violence by tweeting a picture then it's clear that all the human rights training sessions they've attended have been wasted'.

### The Government's Position

The Ministry of Interior issued a statement in which it stated that the HRW statement was contradictory and contained many mistakes such as quoting officials in the Ministry incorrectly and ignoring Government reforms. The Ministry also pointed out that the human rights delegation was eager to spend most of the time with officials in the Ministry of Interior presenting provocative comments and accusations. The delegation also deliberately ignored all the information

given by leading officials in the Ministry.

The Ministry of Interior stated that it is untrue that there is a lack of accountability for officials and that in reality there have been investigations. The Ministry also refused to acknowledge the accusation regarding the use of excessive force and that it is not serious about making reforms. The statement of the Ministry concluded that it is disappointed with HRW's statement as it is clear that the delegation had pre-conceived ideas before coming to Bahrain; and this suggests that they did not provide an impartial opinion.

The Ministry of Human Rights was also surprised by the statement and argued that it included information that is far from the truth and contradicts reality- despite the efforts made to facilitate the visit. The Ministry also referred to HRW as 'ungrateful' and questioned their agenda towards Bahrain. It also expressed its regret regarding what it considers to be HRW's exaggerations and the fact that it ignored all the achievements that have been taking place on the ground. While stressing the principle of cooperation with international human rights organisations, the Ministry accused some international organisations of using inaccurate and partial sources of information. It then concluded by stating that the Government will reconsider its cooperation with any organisations which have biased stances and political agendas.

The Ministry of Social Development responded by saying that it does not understand the motives behind HRW's accusations and partiality. It also added that 'it was surprised to see the report contradict what was discussed with the Ministry's officials, as well as the use of a language which does not suit the standing of a Human Right Organisations'. The Ministry hoped that HRW's reports will be impartial in the future. On 7 March 2013, the Minister of Social Development, Dr Fatima Balushi, stated in Bahrain news agency that HRW threatened to distort her name and the reputation of other officials in the Ministry if they do not cooperate with

the delegation.

## The Snow Ball grows

The General Director of the Gathering of National Unity, Abdulla Al Howahi, described HRW as having a political agenda and that its report means nothing to them. The General Director of the National Action Charter, Mohammed Al Boainain, repeated the same accusations and demanded that the Government should not allow such an organization to enter Bahrain and described it as suspicious and partial. Fareed Ghazi a member of the National Institution of Human Rights described the report as disappointing and that it was partial and unprofessional. Abdulla Al Dosary the President of Human Rights Principles described the level of the report as low. MP Abdulla bin Howail commented on the report stating that it is far from reality and filled with lies and described the organization as politicised and as having bad intentions. He also added that the purpose of the organization is to blackmail the Government, help in overthrowing the regime and cause political and ethnic unrest. He also believes that Iran and Zionists have penetrated international human rights organizations and called upon the Bahraini Government to stop cooperating with them in the future and to prevent their delegation from entering the country under any pretext; especially as they are continuing their agendas and serving the interests of specific countries and sects.

The Shura Council issued a statement in which it expressed its regret over HRW's report and said that it takes away from its credibility and professionalism and that the Council was surprised about the false information used which clearly shows an unjustified partiality. Furthermore, MP Hasan Bo Khamas regarded the report as direct political interference which could lead to very dangerous outcomes. He also called upon the Government to not allow human rights organizations and the media to visit Bahrain and insult it. MP Mohammed Al Emadi also criticised the unprofessional and one sided nature of

the report- as he put it. Moreover, Alsaaf Islamic Society called for prohibiting international human rights organizations from visiting the country as they distort Bahrain's reputation with their fabricated reports and interfere in the internal affairs of the country. It also added that these 'politicised' organizations should be fought and defamed. The President of Karama Society Ahmad Al Maliky also stated that 'allowing HRW to visit Bahrain was a bad decision'.

## The Position of the Media

Many journalists expressed their anger regarding HRW'S report and called upon the Government to not allow them to enter the country and to hold all the ministers involved accountable. On 3 March 2013, Sayed Abdulqader wrote 'what is the point of opening the doors for organizations which claim to protect human rights, and providing them with information and allowing them to visit prisons and meet anyone they want , then they issue fabricated reports that were previously written before the visit? What is the point of respecting organizations which forge the truth and inflame the problem? These bodies only want schism, so close the doors on their faces as they are not worthy of any respect'.

On 3 March 2013, Fawzyah Rasheed wrote an article entitled: 'When will Bahrain put an end to the politicised international organizations?' In it she wrote 'if the State knows the reality of these organizations, why does it continue to allow them entry? Why give them legitimacy and credibility especially when they meet some officials? They should be treated like the tools of foreign interference'.

On 4 March 2013, Ibrahim Al Sheikh stated that 'the Bahraini people have the right to know who gave these organizations permission to visit the Kingdom'. Jamal Zowaid also wrote on the same day that 'there is no reason for countries to welcome these organizations. Under the title 'they are intelligence agents and not human rights organizations', Abdulmenim Ibrahim wrote on 5 March 2013: 'these organizations are biased and unfair to

the people and to Governments. They are merely tools for foreign intelligence agencies and their members are spies and not human rights defenders'. He also added 'we have allowed a thief into our house and then we complain that we've been robbed.'

On 7 March 2013, Mohammed Mubark Juma criticised the performance of the Ministry of Human Rights and held it politically and administratively responsible for inviting the human rights delegation. On 3 March 2013, Yusif Binkhaleel saw that the Bahraini Government gave the delegation credibility when it allowed its members to enter Bahrain and visit some institutions and meet some figures. He also demanded that human rights organisations should not be allowed to enter Bahrain on the basis of protecting the sovereignty of the state. On 5 March 2013, he criticised the American ambassador in Bahrain for being overly enthusiastic about HRW's visit to Manama and exerting efforts to convince the officials about the importance of dealing with this organization.

On 4 March 2013, Hisham Al Zayany stated 'who allowed HRW to enter Bahrain? is it the Minister of Human Rights? If Minister Salah Ali is responsible for this, he should be held accountable and we should think twice before allowing biased organizations to enter the country'. On 9 March Najat Al Modheky presented her advice: 'the more we open the doors for these organizations, the more stubborn they become'.

HRW responded to both the Ministry of Interior and Ministry of Social Development by saying that their claims are unfounded. Human Rights Watch said in its news release that the meeting with officials from the Social Development Ministry was highly unsatisfactory, based on responses to questions Human Rights Watch raised about the draft law on associations.

Finally, HRW hopes that Bahrain will soon resume its policy, discontinued in 2011, of allowing independent human rights monitors to enter the country and to monitor human rights developments, including getting the perspective of officials and others about progress in meeting human rights obligations.



visit of HRW to Bahrain

## The Relationship with International Human Rights Organizations should not be Jeopardised

The visit of HRW to Bahrain in February and its report on 28th which contained harsh criticisms of the human rights situation sparked the question of how useful it is to continue the relationship with international human rights organizations.

In comparison to other organisations such as Amnesty International, HRW's reports are the harshest. The relation with these organizations has always been tense and the disagreements from the Government's point of view can be summarised as follows:

- When the Government allows human rights organizations to visit Bahrain and meet officials, it does not see a positive result that comes out of their cooperation.
- From the Government's point

of view there is no indication of any appreciation for its clear efforts.

- According to the Government, international human rights reports still depend on one-sided information (the opposition/ local human rights organizations); despite the fact that these organizations are exposed to different point of views with regards to human rights issues. Hence, officials, MPs and journalists are always pessimistic about the benefit of such relations because in their eyes the ultimate result of their reports will always be the same.

Some state: we should learn from our past mistakes and prohibit rights organization from visiting Bahrain.

We in BHRM believe that the previous Government policy of boycotting these organizations has badly affected Bahrain's efforts to find a solution to the crisis. Criticisms of the Government have actually increased due to the fact that it withheld information and hence forced these organisations to rely on limited sources. In addition to this, ignoring these organisations has made the Government look like a criminal trying to hide his crime and this has caused a great deal of embarrassment for the Bahraini Government and its allies, such as the UK.

Furthermore, it is not a good idea to boycott these organizations because currently Bahrain is under the spotlight and experiencing a lot of pressure from the

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international community. The key to easing international pressure is by cooperating with these organizations and providing them with the truth.

The call to sever relations with HRW for example because of its criticism of the violations in Bahrain is, more or less, a call to sever relations with the USA and the entire EU including the UK, as well as the UN and its agencies such as the Human Rights Council. The concern of all these bodies is similar to those of the HRW especially regarding holding those who were involved in the violations accountable and the detention of political activists. The only difference is that HRW raised these issues in a direct, sarcastic and personalised manner.

But why would international organizations never point out any of what the Government view as positive reform steps? The answer to this question is that these organizations are mainly concerned with violations and the ways to eliminate them. They only ignore Government efforts when they do not respond to their basic concerns or when these organizations have a deep problem of trust with a country. Trust is a vital factor and Bahrain should strive to gain the trust of these organizations. Trust cannot

be achieved through the use of negative language and the accusation of having secret agendas, or through the use of promises that cannot be fulfilled on the ground. Some believe that Bahrain has been specifically targeted more than any other country and ask why HRW does not criticise Israel or America? In fact, there are many harsh statements and reports criticising human rights in those countries. Most countries do not like international human rights reports but deal with them differently. And those who undermine these organisations tend to have more pressure exerted on them.

The Bahraini Government has the right to respond to any mistakes included in the reports of international human rights organisations. But what is most important is the way in which this response is presented. It should be backed up with convincing evidence and documents which leaves no room for doubt.

The media also has the right to express its concerns regarding the reports of these organisations but they should explain their issues clearly and not rely on accusations and generalisations. Human Rights reports and statements contain detailed and clear points and anyone who wishes to respond to these points should do so

logically and elaborately.

Bahrain has been on this path before and gained nothing out of it and even if human rights reports are negative, calling for a boycott of human rights organisations will only make the situation worse. These organisations will continue to issue their reports and their impact will remain the same, if not worse.

Allowing Human Rights Organisation frequent entries to Bahrain will help them understand the situation better. In time, and with more reforms, objectivity will be reflected more clearly in their reports. However, it should be noted that positive changes can only take place over time and after the achievement of real development on the ground.

It is important to realise that human rights organisations are the most important source of credible information on human rights all over the world. They also have a great impact on the positions of states and parliaments around the world and are able to exert pressure and influence the international public opinion through their contacts. It is therefore wise to cooperate with them and avoid international isolation which could lead to the adoption of International measures that could include more pressure and defamation.

## Bahrain's National Dialogue on Trial

**The long awaited dialogue has begun after the King called upon all parties, the opposition, the loyalists and the Government to discuss the scope of a political solution for the current crisis.**

**The first dialogue sessions witnessed disagreements over the number of participants and the nature of the executive authority's participation and how far it is representing the Government. There were also disagreements regarding the guarantees for the implementation of the results of the dialogue.**

The important thing to note this time is that the coverage of the dialogue by the State's TV and the media was transparent and balanced. The dialogue took place amidst a great amount of articles, statements and heated debates on tweeter between the opposition and Government officials. The crisis on the streets has also been escalating and this has been interpreted as an objection to having dialogue in the first place between the opposition and the authority or as an attempt to influence the dialogue.

Dialogue is facing many challenges and this article attempts to find answers to some crucial questions regarding its nature.

### Why Dialogue Now?

This question has been raised because some loyalists and opposition figures think that they have already won or about to win and hence national dialogue is not needed as matters on the ground have already been determined. For if there was a need for dialogue, why did the citizens have to wait for two years?

In fact local, regional and international circumstances have become more suitable for conducting dialogue. The experiences of the past two years have exposed the failure of all political parties in imposing their concept of a

solution to the problem. In other words, the security solution has failed and the opposition has also reached a dead-end. For more than a year, Bahrain has been suffering from political stagnation and a lack of initiatives and dialogue. It is obvious now that the majority of individuals in both the opposition and the Government have become convinced that if the situation remains the way it is, it will cost the people, the State and the future of Bahrain greatly; and therefore a compromise solution is needed.

With regards to the regional situation, countries with influence in Bahrain have also become convinced that political dialogue is the only way out of the crisis. Reaching a compromise solution is better than adopting a radical stances that can only lead to dire consequences as has been illustrated by events in some of the Arab Spring countries .

Moreover, it is feared that the protests, confrontations, violence and casualties on the street will continue and could spread a feeling of disappointment and despair as to the possibility of reaching a peaceful solution; and this could escalate the situation even more. It is also notable that violence has increased during the past months and this will have a negative impact on Bahrain's stability.

On the international level, dialogue has been encouraged and the sweeping

political changes taking place in the Middle East have forced Washington and other Western countries to reassess their positions. These countries stress that political reforms are the best option. The international community strongly calls for a political dialogue that is consensual, serious and potentially fruitful in Bahrain. This was reflected by the fact that the dialogue initiated by the King of Bahrain was welcomed by many of the world's most powerful countries.

### Is this Dialogue Serious Enough?

This dialogue is indeed serious. In the past, all parties claimed that they are ready for dialogue but in fact they lacked the political will. The King's call for dialogue this time is genuine and this was apparent in the statements of the Crown Prince during his meeting with Ban Ki-Moon in Kuwait in January 2013. However, there are some who still have doubts regarding the Government's intentions especially as there is a lack of trust between the various political parties.

### Are Local Circumstances Suitable for Dialogue?

Yes the circumstances are suitable because all political parties including the Shias, Sunnis and the royal family have reached the conclusion that dialogue is the only solution and the way out of the crisis.

Due to the sectarian polarizations, social division and incitement, Bahraini society has become tired of the long

standing political conflict and sectarian division and would like to see a solution. This does not mean that there are no extreme elements, within both the loyalists and the opposition, who oppose dialogue.

Moreover, the procedures that were taken by the Government with regards to implementing Bassiouni's recommendations have contributed to reducing the tension so that the political process can progress.

### Will the Dialogue Succeed?

This depends on the requirements of the dialogue and how its objectives, including national consensus, are achieved. The BHRM believes that dialogue should achieve the following:



**First:** it should lead to a permanent political solution so that Bahrain will not constantly face political unrest every ten or twenty years. The country needs a long term solution.

**Second:** long term solutions require that the principles of justice and partnership are met. Compromise is necessary so that dialogue does not result in a temporary solution. Justice should be achieved for all Bahrainis and for all social segments in order to guarantee a long term political solution.

**Third:** in order for dialogue to succeed, all parties should make painful compromises. It is not possible for dialogue to succeed if each party sticks to its own demands and refuses to compromise. Finding a middle ground

and reaching a consensual solution between the royal family, Sunnis and Shias requires a mutual compromise which addresses the problem and achieves the optimum level of justice and balance.

### Obstacles Facing Dialogue

1. The presence of extreme elements that do not believe in dialogue or middle grounds. Those who call for radical solutions would like to see the dialogue fail and would even resort to sectarian incitement and the use of violence.
2. There is a lack of awareness among some political parties who believe that dialogue will benefit one party only. In fact all the Bahraini people will benefit from the dialogue and should believe that making mutual compromises will benefit everyone.
3. The success of the dialogue will determine the success of national reconciliation. All parties should realise that we are in the process of political dialogue and political and social reconciliation and that they should strive to protect the interests and the stability of the country, and to restore life back into the social fabric which has been torn by sectarianism.

### Steps Needed to Make the Dialogue Succeed

**First-** calming the street, preparing it to accept the outcome of the dialogue and giving it hope for stability, freedom and democracy. This does not mean that the public should be given false hopes as this could lead to great disappointments and further escalation.

**Second:** putting into place initiatives

aiming at reducing tension; such as releasing prisoners.

**Third:** Easing tension especially in the media belonging to political parties.

### What if the Dialogue Fails?

1. This will constitute a great obstacle to holding any future dialogues.
2. The country could enter a new phase of escalation that could increase the options of violence and radicalism.
3. It could lead to the strengthening of the extreme factions within the political process at the expense of the moderate forces.
4. It is most likely that social and sectarian divisions will widen.
5. It could also lead to further foreign interference in the Bahraini affairs by other countries and international organizations.

### What will Dialogue Achieve?

- Bahrain will regain its position regionally and internationally and will try to rebuild its social and national unity.
- The economy will recover and this will benefit the welfare and prosperity of the people.
- Trust in the political leadership, the political process and the future will increase.
- Bahrain will regain the reputation it lost due to the crisis.
- Human rights will develop greatly because of the strong tie between political and human rights reforms.
- The positive development in Bahrain will reflect on all GCC countries and will encourage dialogue and political reform.



## Adhering to Human Rights Standards

### A Battle to Gain the Trust of International Human Rights Organizations

Developing the human rights and political situation is a battle that must take place within Bahrain itself and not outside it. This is because the main political players are in Bahrain and it is the Bahraini people who will benefit from the development and improvement of the situation.

The reactions of the outside world are merely a symptom of the root of the problem. Therefore, all efforts should be directed at solving the domestic problems and issues.

The political crisis which erupted two years ago has had a negative effect on the Human Rights situation and put Bahrain in the spotlight of foreign media and international organizations. Both parties, the opposition and loyalists, are trying hard to lobby the world behind their respective points of view. To achieve this end, they are prepared to present exaggerated or even fabricated information in order to mobilise international public opinion and gain support for their political positions.

We were hoping that political disagreements will be dealt with locally and that the concerned parties will exert serious efforts in order to reach a political solution to the crisis, as opposed to moving their disagreements abroad in order to score points against each other.

The conduct of both the loyalists and opposition elements during a meeting in Geneva in September 2012 was an example of the lack of respect for the opinions of others. The situation even necessitated the interference of UN security and this negatively affected their credibility. Each party also filed a complaint against the other.

The BHRM believes that the problem in Bahrain is a political one that has human rights implications. Hence all efforts should be concentrated on solving the political issues inside the country. The failure to find a political solution resulted in the problem being transferred abroad within a Human Rights concept. International organizations have

become—at least in the eyes of some—part of the political disagreement as they are seen to be supporting one side against the other.

Bahraini delegations abroad failed to adhere to human rights standards in dealing with representatives of International Human Rights Institutions and Organisations by either providing incorrect and exaggerated information or inaccurate analysis. For instance, the statements of some international bodies were manipulated in order to make use of them politically. This in turn affected the credibility of these delegations.

On February 15th 2013, during a visit to France, a Bahraini parliamentary delegation met the President of the International Federation for Human Rights FIDH, Mrs Suhair Bal-hassan. The meeting took place at the organisation's Headquarters with the purpose of discussing the situation in Bahrain. On 19 February 2013 the Bahrain News Agency issued a statement

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by the Parliament which stated that (The president of FIDH expressed the appreciation of the International Human Rights Organisations of the serious and effective steps taken by Bahrain in implementing the BICI's recommendations as well as the latest UPR recommendations.)

On the 21st of February 2013, the FIDH, issued a statement denying that quote attributed to its president and stating that the latter has actually expressed concern over the ongoing grave and systematic human rights violations, and over what she views as a failure to effectively implement both Bassiouni's and the UPR's recommendations.. FIDH kindly advised the authorities to allocate the State's resources to addressing the deep human rights crisis rather than to misleading PR campaigns.

The same scenario was repeated after a meeting on February 18th in Brussels with EU Parliamentary member, Marietje Schaake, a Dutch politician. On 20 February, Schaake posted on her website a statement in which she stated that she agreed with the delegation that the meeting would be off the record. , but was stunned when news of the meeting were reported in Bahrain with a false and fabricated account of what was actually deliberated. She added that even though she believes in transparency but due to the fact that she had in the past experienced a number of cases where Bahraini media published articles that were untrue, she wanted to avoid any publications. According to the EU Parliamentarian, this incident has

undermined her meeting with the Bahraini delegation.

Several points can be derived from the above case:

1. It is obvious that both sides of the conflict are seeking to employ the human rights card on the International level as part of their domestic political battle. Each side wants to highlight its successes and its opponents' losses and failures. To do this, some parties find themselves tempted to exaggerate their achievements and use the media to do this. However, all political players should remember that as a result of the communication revolution, all statements are readily available for anyone and anywhere. Also, human right organisations monitor what is published locally.
2. These kinds of mistakes highlight the fact that the root of the problem is political, and that the Human rights work is fairly new to these political parties that lack the experience in this field. If these parties had abided by the rules of the human rights community, such mistakes would not have been repeated. Whoever wants to be involved in human rights work should become very careful regarding misinformation, especially when dealing with foreign bodies. The party that adheres the most to the standards of professionalism will be more able to convince international organizations of its point of view. It would not detract from their status

or efficiency if, rather than resort to the practice of sweetening the outcome of their meetings abroad, official or parliamentarian delegations could follow a more appropriate route by issuing statements following such meetings that are credible and more in line with the facts , such as stating that they took note of the issues raised during the meetings regarding human rights in Bahrain and that they did their best to explain all the steps that has been taken to improve the situation and reassure the International Community of Bahrain's continued commitment to cooperation with international organizations in order to redress past mistakes and improve human rights. Such kind of discourse would be closer to the truth, promote trust and build credibility, as opposed to a discourse that falsely claims that the international organizations were given all the facts and had apologized for misunderstanding the local situation; or that Bahrain has become an oasis for human rights and grand unprecedented achievements, as this involves exaggeration and fabrication. Such kind of discourse is outdated and could undermine the positive efforts of the Government.

It's most unlikely that international human rights organizations will be changing their stances soon. Both time and effort are needed to develop the human rights situation locally. This will also require a considerable amount of transparency, flexibility, honesty and openness. These qualities are crucial if you want to build a relationship with the international organizations based on credibility and trust.

### 44 countries endorse a statement on Bahrain in Geneva

## Bahrain: the Statement Undermines our Efforts

On 28 February 2013, a statement that was initiated by Switzerland, signed and endorsed by 44 countries and read to the Human Rights Council welcomed the visit of the OHCHR delegation to Bahrain. The statement also appreciated the willingness of the Government of Bahrain to allow the members of the delegation access to all the requested places and institutions and the opportunity to meet with all the individuals they wanted. It also welcomed the acceptance of the Government of Bahrain to the proposed visit by the Special Rapporteur on Torture scheduled for May 2013. The statement commended the resumption of national dialogue on 10 February 2012, and encouraged all parties to participate in a constructive way. The statement also encouraged the Government of Bahrain to continue to work with all participants in the dialogue in order to work toward building an open, democratic and inclusive society with equal opportunities for all.

It also expressed its concern regarding the continued detention of persons exercising their rights to freedom of opinion and expression, including human rights defenders. It also mentioned the unfair trials of political activists and their harsh sentences. The statement also urged the Government of Bahrain to uphold the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and association and to exercise restraint when reacting to public gatherings. It also asked protesters to act peacefully. Furthermore, the statement criticised the decisions by the Government of Bahrain to revoke the nationality of 31 citizens, which left several of them stateless, and to dismiss or imprison medical professionals. It also expressed its concern regarding the fact that those who have allegedly committed human rights violations are yet to face prosecution.

Finally, it called upon Bahrain to address these concerns and expedite the implementation of the recommendations received from the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry and the recommendations of the Universal Periodic Review. It also urged the Government of Bahrain to enhance its cooperation with the OHCHR and allow for a fully comprehensive collaboration. Furthermore, it called upon the

Government of Bahrain to cooperate with the Special Rapporteur on freedom of association and assembly and the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders.

### Government's Response

On 4 March 2013, Bahrain's representative in Geneva, Dr. Yusuf Bucheeri, responded by stating that the joint statement given on February 28 2013 had drifted completely, and has no place or link to the interactive dialogue with the annual report of the High Commissioner, and stressed that the joint statement has come out of context in its form and procedural qualities. The Ambassador also stressed that the statement does not reflect the facts of the positive initiatives of the Kingdom of Bahrain in the field of human rights and it detracts from the achievements in this regard. He also said that the Joint Statement detracts much from the efforts made by the Kingdom, and it offended the true picture of the respect for human rights achieved by the continuous development in Bahrain where the provisions of the courts, rights to freedom of expression, freedom of assembly are fully guaranteed, adding that any legal action taken in connection with violent demonstrations, unauthorized gatherings and actions that threatens the security of the people and the country, are taken within the framework of the law and the respect for human rights.

Regarding the issue of the decision to withdraw nationalities, Mr. Bucheeri has confirmed that this was in accordance with the conditions approved by the Bahraini law and public international law, adding that the process of a person in a "stateless" position is not in itself illegal if there is valid evidence of threatening national security and it should be noted that some of these people have filed to challenge the decision of their nationality being withdrawn, and that the possibility of such appeals are considered for all before the court. He stated that he did not see any benefit or real added value in making such a joint statement, and that it is important to set a positive climate that is conducive to the

process of implementing the recommendations of the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry and to the fruition of the dialogue initiative. He also touched on the forthcoming visit by the High Commissioner for Human Rights this year in response to an invitation by the Government of Bahrain in order to witness what progress has been achieved in the promotion and protection of human rights. The Human Rights Minister Dr. Salah Ali met the Swiss representative and stated that this statement does not serve the mutual relations between the two countries, has no positive outcomes and that its timing was unsuitable. He also added that currently, the Kingdom of Bahrain is engaging in national dialogue sessions and does not want to ruin the positive atmosphere in the country by such statements which serve no one and could send the wrong message and fuel violence.

### Remarks and Pointers

1. It is obvious that the Government of Bahrain has taken positive steps but the international human rights community still believes that they are slow and insufficient to address their issues of concern.
2. The high number of countries that signed the statement, which included the USA and Britain, indicates the growing pressure exerted on Bahrain to address the crisis. The content of the statement has also been repeated by human rights organizations. The lack of reforms and the continuation of violations will result in international condemnation and could lead to more international pressure.
3. The success of the national dialogue and the achievement of national reconciliation will definitely reduce foreign pressure and hopefully violations will be reduced as well.
4. International human rights organizations that view the statement as a reflection of their own position and influence believe that Bahrain still has an opportunity to develop its human rights situation by taking procedures on the ground in order to reduce the sources of concern.