



# General Assembly

Distr.: General  
30 August 2017

English only

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## Human Rights Council

Thirty-sixth session

11-29 September 2017

Agenda item 3

**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,  
political, economic, social and cultural rights,  
including the right to development**

### **Written statement\* submitted by the Conseil International pour le soutien à des procès équitables et aux Droits de l'Homme, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status**

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[17 August 2017]

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\* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

GE.17-15079(E)



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## Freedom of Expression in Bahrain\*

Recent years have seen a serious decline in respect for freedom of expression and the associated rights of freedom of association, assembly and of religion or belief in Bahrain. However, the first six months of 2017 have seen increasing instances of intimidation and reprisals against human rights defenders, journalists, and active members of civil society in Bahrain.

Amid the heightened crackdown on critical voices, the Bahraini government has regressed to a near total suppression of human rights. All major opposition parties have now been dissolved, and stripped of their assets, where peaceful protesters have also died from injuries sustained at the hands of security forces due to the use of birdshot pellets and tear gas.

- **Freedom of Expression in Numbers**

Between 1<sup>st</sup> of January and 30<sup>th</sup> of June 2017, a total of 982 arbitrary arrests has been recorder in Bahrain. Eighty four of them were children, and twenty eight were women<sup>1</sup>. A total of 772 persons were sentenced in 187 politically motivated cases, and over 300 persons of them had their Bahraini citizenship revoked, rendering them stateless. Moreover, 59 life sentences were handed down to these cases.

- **Victims of Freedom of Expression**

The attacks have widened to include civil society actors, academics and religious figures with diverse views.

On July of this year, Bahraini Court sentenced the prominent Human Rights Defender and the President of the Bahrain Center for Human Rights (BCHR) Nabeel Rajab to **two years in prison** in absentia. The Court convicted him on charges that stem solely from his peaceful activism, including for advocating human rights on TV.

Rajab was charged with “publishing and broadcasting false news that undermines the prestige of the state” in three televised interviews in 2015 and 2016. The trial and verdict is the culmination of more than a year of unlawful pre-trial detention under harsh conditions that have led to severe health issues necessitating hospitalization of Rajab for several months.

SALAM for Democracy and Human Rights continues to document cases of arbitrary arrests and detentions as well as torture and other ill-treatment of detainees held on suspicion of involvement in security-related offences. The main purpose of torture and other ill-treatment appears to be to extract false confessions that are used as evidence in trials. Some of those convicted on the basis of such evidence have been sentenced to death. Unfair trials have remained commonplace in Bahrain.

- **Freedom of Expression and Media**

Bahraini media workers and citizen journalists continued to operate in a highly restrictive environment in 2014. Since the emergence of a prodemocracy protest movement in 2011, those who disseminate information on anti-government demonstrations, human rights abuses, or opposition views have suffered repercussions including imprisonment and torture.

New arrests and prosecutions were reported throughout 2017, encouraging self-censorship among the country’s mainstream media. The government also maintained direct censorship in the form of extensive website blocking.

The Ministry of Information Affairs suspended Al Wasat, the only independent newspaper in Bahrain, on 4 June 2017, effectively silencing the media in Bahrain and violating the right to freedom of expression. Al Wasat’s suspension is the

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.bahrainrights.org/en/node/8876>

latest in a recent spate of reprisals against independent media and civil society actors, including journalists, writers, and human rights defenders.

Bahrain was already counted among the 20 most restrictive countries for press globally, with Reporters Without Borders ranking it as 164 out of 180 countries in its World Press Freedom Index.<sup>2</sup>

Foreign journalists have been denied entry to the country, whilst local international media correspondents have been prevented from working with foreign news agency's. Nazeeha Saeed, a correspondent for France 24 and Radio Monte Carlo Doualiya was recently charged with practicing journalism without a license, after her request for a permit renewal was rejected, Saeed was fined in absentia.

In light of all the above mentioned, SALAM for Democracy and Human Rights calls on the government of Bahrain to:

- Release immediately and unconditionally all prisoners of conscience, imprisoned solely for exercising their rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly;
- Repeal or amend all laws which criminalize exercise of the rights to freedom of expression, and peaceful assembly;
- Ensure the independence and impartiality of Bahrain's human rights institutions and their investigations into human rights abuses;
- Halt any forced expulsion of Bahraini nationals or revocation of nationality that would render an individual stateless, allow those who have been expelled to return to Bahrain and reinstate the nationality of all those who have had it arbitrarily revoked;
- Ensure that trials comply with international law and standards on fair trial, including by excluding any statements or other forms of evidence that are elicited by torture, ill-treatment or other forms of coercion;
- And invite the Special Rapporteurs on the Rights to Freedom of Peaceful assembly and of Association and on Freedom of Expression to visit Bahrain.

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\* Salam for Democracy and Human Rights, NGO without consultative status, also shares the views expressed in this statement.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://rsf.org/en/bahrain>