



# General Assembly

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## Human Rights Council

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Human rights situations that require the Council's attention

### **Written statement\* submitted by the Organization for Defending Victims of Violence, 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.

[3 June 2012]

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

## Human rights situation in Bahrain

Bahrain is one of the Persian Gulf southern states, an island with a population of seven hundred thousand, approximately 70% of which are of the Shia faith. The country is ruled by the Sunni minority (Al Khalifa). Unfortunately in spite of years of peaceful coexistence of these two groups, due to anti-Shia policies and increasing daily pressures in squeezing the breathing space of the Shia, in the last two years a wave of tension has engulfed the country. Instead of a logical approach towards the demands of the majority, the government threatens, detains, mistreats, puts pressure on the people and even resorts to killing them.

In fact it can be said that the people's protests in Bahrain were the first and have been the longest in the Arab Spring wave, and even though the revolutionaries in Tunisia and or Egypt are taking democratic steps towards reaching their objectives and demands, in the beginning the people of Bahrain only wanted an improvement of the political and social lives, right now due to the violent approach of the government towards their initial and rightful demands, and also interference of other countries military forces, the people are faced with grave violation of their fundamental political, social, and economic rights.

It must be reminded that in 2011 in response to the objections of international organizations and NGOs monitoring the human rights situation of the country, the Bahraini government announced the setting up of an independent fact-finding commission to review the problem from various angles and find solutions to offenses and punish the perpetrators and also reviews the violated rights of the people. Although the commission was set up and some of its findings in its report were met by the protestor objection, nevertheless the findings of the report indicate the extensive violation of Bahraini security forces and police, all of which were unfortunately ignored. For example:

- According to part of the report entitled "death due to protests", the independent commission reported the death of 35 people during the 14 February to 15 April 2011 period, the majority of which were due to the excessive violence of the security forces, where in some instances the excessive use of tear gas which resulted in the death of several children.
- In another part of the report entitled "Acts of torture by the security forces" it was revealed that five of the detained protestors had died as a result of being tortured by the security forces. On this basis many of the detained protestors have been subjected to physical and psychological abuse. In its report the commission stresses on the point that the extent and nature of physical and psychological mistreatment shows the intentionality of these processes where in some instances they were done to get confessions out of the detainees, and in other instances to punish individuals. In the report there are 559 torture complaints by individuals during their detention. All apart from 9 of these individuals are Shia.
- As it can be seen in the reports of several NGOs, the volume of mistreatment and inhuman treatment by the Bahraini military in 2011 and the first five months of 2012 has been on the increase and nonstop. Some of these mistreatments which the commission published in its report in 2011 include: blindfolding, handcuffing, making individuals stand for long periods of time, beating up, punching, hitting the detainees with hose pipe, cable, whip, and metal bars or metal and wooden objects, electric shock, sleep deprivation, being placed in cold or hot places, insults, threaten with rape and defamation of religion (Shia). The commission has stressed that the weakness in answerability mechanisms of the security forces, has resulted in a form of a culture of impunity from punishment, which has provided the possibility for the extensive use of torture and mistreatment.

- According to the independent commission's report the Bahraini security forces in responding to the people's protests have violated two fundamental and general principles for the assessment of the use of force, meaning urgency and proportion. Both the types of weapons for response to the protestors, and also their use of them in the protests have been the violations of the afore mentioned, and in many instances the security forces did not observe the law in targeting individuals. Unfortunately despite the publication of the findings of the commission in 2011, nonetheless the testimonies of several human rights activists, international NGOs in particular, the behaviour and treatment of the security forces in Bahrain towards the protestors who still haven't accessed their most basic rights, has not changed and presently with the use of inhuman and violent methods the security forces confront any form of objections or protests and or the assembly of citizens for the realization of their rights.
- According to the commission report and the confirmation of human rights organizations in Bahrain, during the unrests the security forces systematically attached the homes of citizens, arrested the protesters and scared the households. The arrests mostly took place in the middle of the night by masked individuals, which after breaking the doors down of homes and forceful entry in some instances they frisked individuals. These actions which often were with insult to religious beliefs and verbal humiliation of the individuals, took place in front of women and children of the families, and in most cases the women of the families were forced to stand in front of the authorities in their bed garments. The detainees were sent to detention centres blindfolded. According to international activist researchers the pattern of these arrests had a footprint in three state institutions of the Ministry of Defense, Security Organization and defense forces of Bahrain. The total number of detainees during the publication of the report was 2929, 2178 of which had not been charged with anything. Unfortunately the Bahrain government has not provided satisfactory answers to the huge volume of human rights violations.

Sadly no meaningful changes have taken place to all the above mentioned situation, and the grave and extensive violation of the rights of protesters and organizers and peaceful associations continues unabated. The arrests of two renowned Bahraini human rights activists Nabeel Rajab and Abdolhadi Al-Khavajeh are a demonstration of the continuation of this unpleasant situation. Rajab is a well-known Bahraini human rights activist who was arrested by the authorities in early May and is the director of the Bahrain Human Rights Centre NGO. It must be said that he was recently released from custody. He has always peacefully called for attention and investigation of human rights violation cases committed by the security forces such as the crackdowns and extensive arrests of protesters.

The arrest of Abdolhadi Al-Khavajeh and his bad treatment in jail, has even made four UN special rapporteurs (human rights defenders, freedom of expression, independence of judges and lawyers, and torture) jointly signed a demand for Bahrain to immediately release him, and ensure his physical and mental health in accordance with international prisoners' treatment standards.

What is clear is that right now the protesters and Shia groups in Bahrain demand fundamental reforms in all fields in the country, and an end to the crackdowns. Strong discrimination against the Shia from Bahraini officials, lack of Shia's access to equal political, social, and economic rights, putting restrictions in place to the rights of the Shia from holding religious rituals are all instances where the people of Bahrain want to see removed.

As a nongovernmental organization active in political, civil, social, economic and cultural rights, we call upon the Bahraini government to respect all its international commitments, and also pay special attention to the recommendations given in the second UPR on the

country which was focused on the government's treatment of Bahraini protesters, to make a real and honest effort to improve the conditions of a minority which make up the majority of the country, and take steps towards real justice in the country.

We also call upon Human Rights Council members to pay more attention to the human rights situation of Bahrain, and to give the country a deadline to apply meaningful reforms and in the end just like what's happened to-date, no positive action is not seen from the government, the Council must consider the possibility of holding special sessions on the human rights situation of Bahrain, and to appoint a special rapporteur if necessary. Perhaps this way the Bahraini government might pay further attention to its international and humanity commitments.

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