

Stop Torture - update May 2015

1. Pleased to see the PI link added to the Southend Amnesty website; particularly important given the mandate that this Conservative Government now has to extend invasive surveillance for the next five years. This Government that habitually supports HR abusers granted a license to Gamma industries in Bahrain allowing Bahraini dissidents to be harassed in the UK....

If you care about online anonymity the Tor browser bundle and hushmail are both available free; you can load TOR thru an unencrypted browser; sign up for hushmail and then access the e-mail anonymously through your Tor browser. Bear in mind that the encryption is only effective on an end to end basis. (hushmail to hushmail)

2. Delighted to see also the exhortation for members to provide biographies from the April minutes: looking forward to participating and reading the 'drivers' for others involvement in the group. I have attached my biography separately.

3. Southend West Parliamentary Candidates responses to HR enquiries positive with the exception of Amess.

4. Please see below AI report on Bahrain; which is abridged to include most relevant parts. Please note, in particular the allegations of torture and the CPS's attempt to excuse an Al Khalifa torturer from prosecution , brilliantly foiled by a High Court of Justice edict.

Amnesty International Report 2014/15

Kingdom of Bahrain

Head of state: King Hamad bin 'Issa Al Khalifa

Head of government: Shaikh Khalifa bin Salman Al Khalifa

The government continued to stifle and punish dissent and to curtail freedoms of expression, association and assembly. Torture of detainees continued and a climate of impunity prevailed. Twenty-one Bahrainis were stripped of their nationality. The courts sentenced five people to death..

Background

In March, a bomb explosion at al-Daih village killed three police officers. In December, bomb attacks in the villages of Karzakan and Demistan killed a police officer and another person. The government banned the "14 February Coalition", a youth movement, and two other organizations declaring them terrorist groups.

Amendments to anti-terrorism legislation adopted in December increased police powers, allowing them to detain terrorism suspects incommunicado for up to 28 days.

Representatives of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights visited Bahrain from February to May to assess human rights training needs.

Freedom of expression

The authorities continued to clamp down on dissent. In February, shortly before the third anniversary of the outbreak of public protests in 2011, the government increased the penalty for publicly insulting the King, the Bahraini flag or the national emblem to between one and seven years in prison and a heavy fine.

Dr Sa'eed Mothaher Habib al-Samahiji, an ophthalmologist, was arrested on 1 July to serve a one-year prison term imposed on him in December 2013 on a charge of “publicly insulting the King” in a speech at the funeral of a protester killed by a police car. He was held at Jaw Prison, south of Manama, at the end of the year.

Human rights defender Nabeel Rajab was released in May after completing a two-year prison term for “illegal gathering” but was rearrested in October on charges of insulting public institutions.

Freedom of assembly

All public gatherings in the capital Manama remained indefinitely banned under government decrees issued in 2013. However, sporadic protests were held in other places. The security forces arrested scores of people for participating in protests; some received prison sentences.

Ahmad Mshaima'e alleged that security officials tortured him in the days following his arrest, but the authorities did not investigate his allegations. “insulting the King”.

In December, human rights defender Mohammad al Maskati and 10 other defendants were sentenced to six-month prison terms on charges of an “illegal gathering”.

Freedom of association

The government restricted freedom of association using new powers that allowed the Minister of Justice to suspend or dissolve political associations on vague grounds. The court action began shortly after the Public Prosecution charged al-Wefaq's leader, Sheikh Ali Salman, and his deputy with “meeting foreign officials without notifying” the government, after they met with the visiting US Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, Tom Malinowski. In late December, the authorities arrested Sheikh Ali Salman on charges including incitement to promote the change of the political system by force, threats and other illegal means.

Deprivation of nationality

In July, the King decreed amendments to the 1963 Nationality Law giving the courts new powers to strip Bahrainis of their nationality. The law also allowed the authorities to revoke the nationality of people who live abroad continuously for more than five years without informing the Ministry of the Interior. Twenty-one people had their nationalities revoked by the courts in 2014.

Torture and other ill-treatment

Torture continued to be reported despite the establishment of a number of official bodies to investigate allegations of torture and other ill-treatment in custody. Methods of torture reported included severe beating, punching, electric shocks, suspension by the limbs, rape and threats of rape, and deliberate exposure to extreme cold.

Mohamed 'Ali al-'Oraibi alleged that security officials tortured him over five days following his arrest on 2 February at Manama International Airport when he arrived from abroad. He said officials kept him naked while they interrogated him, subjected him to electric shocks on his genitals, suspended him by his limbs and beat him with a stick, and sexually assaulted him. He was released on 17 April, pending further investigations. He complained to the authorities but no investigation into his alleged torture was known to have been conducted.

Excessive use of force

In March a royal decree (Decree 24 of 2014) was issued regulating the use of force and firearms.

The security forces regularly used excessive force to disperse opposition protests. Among other methods, they fired shotguns and tear gas at protesters, causing injuries and at least two deaths.

Sayed Mahmoud Sayed Mohsen, aged 14, died on 21 May after security forces fired tear gas and shotguns at protesters participating in a funeral procession on the island of Sitra. His family said he had shotgun pellets in his chest suggesting that he had been shot at close range. The Ministry of the Interior announced an investigation but had not disclosed its outcome by the end of the year.

Impunity

The number of investigations into torture and other ill-treatment of detainees remained low and the authorities continued to detain some of those that the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry said had been tortured in 2011. In practice, despite a few prosecutions of low-ranking officers, the security forces operated with a large degree of impunity amid continuing reports of torture of detainees and the use of excessive force against protesters.

Two officers accused of causing the death of 16-year-old Hussein al-Jazairi at a protest on 14 February 2013 in al-Daih reportedly remained at liberty and did not stand trial in 2014. Hussain al-Jazairi died after he was hit in the chest by shotgun pellets fired at close range.

In September, the High Court of Justice in England quashed a ruling by the United Kingdom (UK) Crown Prosecution Service that the King of Bahrain's son, Prince Nasser bin Hamad Al Khalifa, had diplomatic immunity in the UK. The High Court ruled that he could face prosecution in the UK for alleged complicity in torturing detainees in 2011 if he entered the UK.

Death penalty

The courts passed five death sentences during the year, one of which was annulled by the Court of Appeal in December.

Mahir Abbas al-Khabaz was sentenced to death on 19 February after he was convicted of killing a police officer in 2013. The court accepted a "confession" allegedly obtained through torture as evidence against him. An appeal court confirmed his death sentence and he was awaiting a final decision by the Court of Cassation at the end of the year.

5. In regard to the 5 ST victims....

Continuing problems accessing updates on ST victims through the 'campaign lowdown' site recommended by Amnesty in relation to earlier enquiries.

Moses update from February 2015 appears either to be not correct or not covered... The calls for commutation of his death sentence....appear not to have been successful. Please refer to attached February 2015 update (pages 3 &4) as an aide memoire in regard to Moses...

Claudia Mendez - released - all charges turned over 11=02 2015.

No other developments accessible through any other AI web sources.

6. Other ST related matters

www.amnesty.org.uk/actions gives access to 16 or so '2 click e- petitions'

The major 'torture related' topics therein are as set out below:-

1.Ongoing -Raif Badawi - sentenced to 1000 lashes for free speech campaign , 2.UK investigation into our Governments complicity in the recent CIA torture expositions, 3.Demand justice for torture victims, 4.the EU torture trade- 'spiked baton'.

7. Please see below Amnesty supplement in regard to Saudi HR abuses :-

Saudi Arabia: 10 brutal facts beyond the Raif Badawi case

Tomorrow marks eight weeks since the Saudi Arabian authorities publicly flogged the blogger and activist Raif Badawi, sentenced to 1,000 lashes and 10 years in prison for “insulting Islam” and founding an online forum for political debate....

.Spike in executions

Saudi Arabia is among the world’s top executioners, with dozens of people being put to death annually, many in public beheadings. So far this year 40 people have been executed – almost four times the equivalent number for this time last year.

Crackdown on activists

The authorities have targeted the small but vocal community of human rights defenders, including by using anti-terrorism laws to suppress their peaceful actions to expose and address human rights violations.

No space for dissent

All public gatherings, including demonstrations, remain prohibited under an order issued by the Interior Ministry in 2011.

Systematic discrimination against women

Women and girls remain subject to discrimination in law and practice, with laws that subordinate their status to men, particularly in relation to family matters such as marriage, divorce, child custody and inheritance. Women who supported a campaign against a de facto ban on women drivers face the threat of arrest and other harassment and intimidation.

Routine torture in custody

Former detainees, trial defendants and others have told Amnesty International that the security forces’ use of torture and other ill-treatment remains common and widespread, and that those responsible are never brought to justice.

Arbitrary arrests and detentions

Scores of people have been arrested and detained in pre-trial detention for six months or more, which breaches the Kingdom's own criminal codes. Detainees are frequently held incommunicado during their interrogation and denied access to their lawyers. Some human rights activists have been detained without charge or trial for more than two years.

Entrenched religious discrimination

Members of the Kingdom's Shi'a minority, most of whom live in the oil-rich Eastern Province, continue to face entrenched discrimination that limits their access to government services and employment. Shi'a activists have received death sentences or long prison terms for their alleged participation in protests in 2011 and 2012.

Mass deportation of migrant workers

According to the Interior Ministry, a crackdown on irregular foreign migrant workers in November 2013 led to the deportation of more than 370,000 people. Some 18,000 were still being detained last March. Thousands of people were summarily returned to Somalia, Yemen or other states where they were at risk of human rights abuses.

What happens in the Kingdom, stays in the Kingdom

The Saudi Arabian authorities continue to deny access to independent human rights organizations like Amnesty International, and they have been known to take punitive action, including through the courts, against activists and family members of victims who contact us.