

BAHRAIN

STATE OF BAHRAIN

Head of state: Shaikh Hamad bin 'Issa Al Khalifa

Head of government: Shaikh Khalifa bin Salman Al Khalifa

Capital: al-Manama

Population: 0.6 million

Official language: Arabic

Death penalty: retentionist

2000 treaty ratifications/signatures: Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court

Human rights violations continued to be reported, although on a lesser scale than in previous years. Scores of people, including juveniles, were reportedly arrested in 2000; some were detained for short periods. Several hundred others arrested in previous years, including prisoners of conscience, remained held without charge or trial. Several people were tried before the State Security Court on charges including "illegal activities and plotting to destabilize the country", and sentenced to up to 12 years' imprisonment. Several Bahraini nationals who had been living abroad were prevented from entering the country. Scores of political prisoners and detainees were released during the year.

Background

2000 saw further significant political and human rights developments. The Amir publicly pledged his commitment to the protection of human rights and expressed his willingness to allow international human rights organizations to visit the country. Increasingly, Bahraini newspapers carried articles on issues such as democracy, free elections and respect for human rights, and in August a journalists' association was set up. For the first time women were urged to take a more active role in the political affairs of the country.

In March and April scores of political prisoners and detainees were released following an order by the Amir. Among those who benefited from the Amir's order were 'Omran Hussain 'Omran and Shaikh Mohammed al-Rayyash; both had been held for more than four years without charge or trial.

A Supreme Judicial Council was established, headed by the President of the Court of Cassation, to deal with judicial matters such as the supervision of the functioning of the courts. However, the Council was given no authority over the Public Prosecution, which remained under the control of the Ministry of the Interior.

In October a new 40-member *Shura* (Consultative) Council was inaugurated and 21 new members, including four women, were appointed by the Amir. The Council has no legislative powers. Four *Shura* Council members, including one woman,

were appointed as new members of the Human Rights Committee. The six-member Committee had been set up in October 1999.

A request for permission to set up a non-governmental human rights organization was turned down by the authorities in October.

In December plans were announced for the establishment of a two-chamber parliament, including an elected chamber with legislative powers, and for Bahrain to become a constitutional monarchy. The *Shura* Council would form the second chamber and keep its advisory role; the plans were subject to a referendum.

Forcible exile

The practice of forcible exile continued to be used to prevent some Bahraini nationals returning to the country after years spent abroad in voluntary exile or for educational purposes. The victims were held for days, sometimes longer, at Bahrain International Airport before being returned to their country of residence or sent elsewhere. They were denied the right to challenge the decision to expel them before a court of law. The authorities claimed that those who were prevented from entering the country were not Bahraini nationals, or had obtained a passport of another state, or did not have valid passports.

Over the years many Bahraini exiles had been allowed to return. However, by the end of 2000 it was estimated that some 700 Bahraini nationals, including women and children, continued to be denied entry to the country.

☞ In June 'Abdul Jalil al-Nu'aيمي, aged 53, was arrested at Bahrain International Airport and forcibly returned to the United Arab Emirates. He had left Bahrain in 1975 after the dissolution of parliament and first attempted to return in 1993. During his arrest in June he was interrogated and told that he would not be allowed into the country because he had not sought pardon from the Amir.

Prisoners of conscience

☞ In March 'Abd al-Wahab Hussain, a prisoner of conscience, appeared before the State Security Court after he had challenged his detention without charge or trial since January 1996. He was released on 17 March only to be rearrested on the same day at his home in al-Nuwaidrat. No reasons were given for his rearrest. In July it was reported that 'Abd al-Wahab Hussain and five other prisoners of conscience — Shaikh Hassan Sultan, Shaikh 'Ali 'Ashour, Shaikh Hussain al-Deihi, Sayyid Ibrahim 'Adnan al-'Alawi and Hassan 'Ali Mshaima' — had been put in solitary confinement to put pressure on them to sign statements agreeing to refrain from any political and religious activities in the future. Shaikh 'Ali 'Ashour was said to have agreed to these conditions and was released in September. Shaikh Hussain al-Deihi was released in December. It was not known whether his release was conditional.

Possible prisoner of conscience

☞ In November Jasim Hussain 'Ali, a university lecturer, was arrested at his home in Hamad Town, allegedly for

providing written analysis about the human rights, political and economic situation in Bahrain to a magazine based in the United Kingdom (UK). He was held for 10 days in incommunicado detention. AI wrote to the authorities and requested clarification of the exact reasons for his arrest.

Unfair trials

People continued to be sentenced to prison terms after grossly unfair trials before the State Security Court. Defendants tried and sentenced by this court have no right of appeal.

☞ Three people — 'Ali Mahdi Youssef, Sa'id al-Shaikh and Hisham 'Ali Hassan Ahmad — who had been in detention since their arrest in November 1998, were fined and sentenced to between two and seven years' imprisonment. They were convicted in May by the State Security Court of "illegal activities and plotting to destabilize the country" by planning to smuggle weapons and explosives into the country and carry out arson attacks. A fourth defendant was sentenced *in absentia* to seven years' imprisonment and six others, also arrested in November 1998 on the same charges, were acquitted. The nine, who had been held without access to lawyers until 17 January 2000, were reportedly tortured to extract confessions. No investigation into the torture allegations was known to have been carried out.

☞ In May, three women — Hanan Salman Ahmad Haidar, Salwa Hassan Ahmad Haidar and Leeda Ahmad 'Issa al-'Oraibi — were sentenced to one year's imprisonment each by the State Security Court for "distributing leaflets and undertaking activities harmful to security". The three were arrested in November 1998 and released on bail the following month. While detained in 1998, Hanan Salman Ahmad Haidar and Salwa Hassan Ahmad Haidar were reportedly tortured in 'Issa Town police station; Salwa Hassan Ahmad Haidar was said to have been beaten on the soles of her feet and suspended by her limbs. All three were released in September 2000, reportedly following an amnesty.

Torture/ill-treatment

There were a number of reports of torture or ill-treatment during 2000. The victims included juveniles suspected of writing anti-government graffiti.

☞ In August Mohammad Sa'eed al-Maqabi, aged 32, was arrested at his home in the village of Barbar, east of al-Manama. During his detention he was reportedly suspended by his arms for hours and beaten with a cable on the soles of his feet (*falaqa*). He was suspected of maintaining links with an opposition activist living abroad. Mohammad Sa'eed al-Maqabi was released at the end of August.

In January the UK authorities announced that an investigation into torture allegations had been launched against Major-General Ian Henderson, a British national and the former head of Bahrain's Security and Intelligence Service (SIS). Major-General Henderson joined Bahrain's security

services in 1966 and retired from all official duties in July 2000. Over the years testimonies collected by human rights organizations suggested that SIS members may have been involved in the torture of political detainees. In one case a former political detainee stated that Major-General Henderson subjected him to physical and psychological torture.

Death penalty

In November, 20-year-old Yoshork Dostazudi, an Ethiopian national working as a housemaid, was sentenced to death for the murder of her employer. Her lawyer lodged an appeal against the verdict in December.

The death sentence has rarely been used in Bahrain; only one execution is known to have been carried out since 1977.

In December the death sentences against 'Ali Ahmad 'Abdallah al-'Usfur, Youssef Hussain 'Abd al-Baqi and Ahmad Khalil Ibrahim al-Kattab were commuted to life imprisonment. They had been sentenced to death in July 1996 in connection with a fire-bomb attack on a restaurant in Sitra in which seven Bangladesh nationals were killed.

AI country report and visits

Report

- Bahrain: Human rights developments and Amnesty International's continuing concerns (AI Index: MDE 11/003/2000)

Visits

AI put forward a proposal for a visit to Bahrain in February. The authorities responded by suggesting a meeting between a high-level delegation from Bahrain and AI delegates in London, UK. This took place in July. The authorities agreed to receive an AI delegation in Bahrain in early 2001.