



THE WORLD PRESS FREEDOM DAY 2012

HUNGER FOR FREEDOM



رابطة الصحافة البحرينية
Bahrain Press Association



THE BAHRAIN PRESS ASSOCIATION

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SUMMARY

In commemoration of the World Press Freedom Day 2012, Journalists in Bahrain will celebrate the event by going on a hunger strike called for by the Bahrain Press Association (“BPA”). The hunger strike is a form of protest to the countless violations and abuses exercised by the regime against Press Freedom along with Freedom of Speech ever since the fourteenth of February 2011.

Holding a hunger strike on such a day is but a scream in the face of the authorities and their intimidating practices towards the freedom of speech. Likewise, it is intended to convey a message by the journalists in Bahrain to the international community to urge all those concerned to exert more pressure on the regime to satisfy its obligations and commitments as per the United Nations’ human rights covenants and treaties.



• *Mazn Mabdi one of the most targeted journalist on the ground during protests*

Violations ... On-going Nightmare

Journalists in Bahrain still recall with deep sorrow and grief two press professionals who were murdered last year (Publisher Kareem Fakhrawy and blogger Zakariya Rashid AlAshiri) while in the custody of the Bahraini authorities. The dramatic loss of such professionals was coupled by arbitral arrests and dismissals of scores of colleagues who were as well subjected to torture while being kept in the detention houses led by the Ministry of Interior's National Security Agency and the Bahrain Defense Force.

The media and press realm in Bahrain had hoped to see the recommendations of the Bahrain independent Commission of Inquiry («BICI») have effect in correcting the course of government policy as per the freedom of expression and information. Dispreitly as it looks,

nothing has become effective on the ground. . Abuses continue in a period considered to be the worst in the history of Bahrain since its independence. This bad reputation was further endorsed by Manama being rated among the top ten most repressive states, according to Reporters without Borders.

The list of media blackouts and suppression of press freedom was not limited to Bahrainis International media correspondents and international news agency journalists have shared the same government hostile polices. Many of these cases have been documented by international organizations for journalists being banned from entering Bahrain on the first anniversary of the protests in the Pearl Roundabout; others were either detained or forced leave the country. (Please refer to the table below).

Witnesses to the Violations

In addition to the reports and statements made by international organizations such as Reporters without Borders, International Federation of Journalists, the Committee to Protect Journalists (USA), along with other international human rights watchdogs, the Report issued by the Bahrain Independent Commission Inquiry (BICI) on November 23, 2011, acknowledges in the chapter pertaining to media violations, the several violations and crimes committed against media professionals and journalists in Bahrain including, among other things, the murdering of Zakariya Al Asheeri on April 9 and Kareem Fakhrawi on April 12 of 2011; the arrests; the torturing; and the mass dismissals of press professionals working in private and public media outlets alike.

The BICI Report, widely known as Bassiouni report, acknowledges the violations committed by the official media institutions in the country represented by the “Authority of Information Affairs & Bahrain TV” stating that they played a direct sectarian role throughout, and opted to impose a firm fist on the media so as to direct it to their political advantage.

It is worth mentioning that the BICI Report, widely known as Bassiouni Report, neglected to acknowledge that the Bahrain TV played a direct role in the arrest and dismissal of many journalists and its usage of inflammatory words with criminal connotations like “traitors, criminals, and Safavis”.



• *Reem Khalifa*



• *Naziba Saeed*

Recommendations pertaining to Apprenticeship Contracts

Despite the mention in Bassiouni's report as per the need to implement the recommendations contained thereof and the various calls made by the international organizations and bodies, the authorities in Bahrain did not take it serious to put in place corrective measures to remedy what was proved by the BICI Report as being violations and abuses. Instead, the Authority of Information Affairs inked training contracts with international media outlets ignoring very obviously the fact that such abuses and violations did not relate to the technical remedies or the poor level of professionalism within the staff. However, it was connected to the media discourse for the coverage and inciting sectarian strife in accordance with policies the media professionals were forced to abide by under political pressure. Therefore, those responsible for the incitement of sectarian strife are still in their posts to run the reform phase after they functioned to commit the violations largely acknowledged by the BICI.



• *Photographer Abmeed Ismael was killed by live ammunition while filming a peaceful protest*



• *Abmeed Ismael's camera*

As per Bassiouni's recommendations pertaining to hold those responsible for the torture to account and bring them before justice, the Bahraini authorities has failed to perform such duty to identify the perpetrators who violated press professionals' rights and acted brutally against them. Until today, the Bahraini Judiciary has only brought the cases of Publisher Kareem Fakhrawi, blogger Zakariya AlAshiri, and journalist Nazeeha Saeed before court. The BPA and other human rights watchdogs have their reservations over the public prosecution procedures to interrogate and try. The BPA considers them as "bogus" trials, as they don't hold the officials accountable for the violations. The Bahraini judiciary has neglected many cases of arbitrary arrests and torture accusations for the majority of media professionals.

In the same context, journalist Reem Khalifa of Al-Wasat Daily Newspaper still faces regime-led targeting through the continuation of her trial in the Bahraini courts despite many international calls to drop any and all charges against her, the latest of which was the report dated January 24, 2012 (Tunisia/London) issued by (writers in Prison Committee of international PEN, Index on Censorship, Arabic Network for Human Rights Information, IFEX, and the Gulf Centre for Human rights) titled «Denial of justice in Bahrain: Stifle freedom of expression and peaceful assembly,» The report called upon the government of Bahrain in one of its recommendations to stop the said trial against Reem Khalifa and end targeting her whatsoever.

Many journalists, who were arbitrarily dismissed from

public and private media outlets, are waiting to be reinstated to their posts; the BPA could not document one single case in which a sacked press professional has been reinstated.

Reference may be made to the report titled «Word Leading to Death» issued by the BPA in 2011 in which the BPA documented all violations and cases of arbitrary dismissals of media professionals. The Authority of Information Affairs offered to reinstate those dismissed professionals to posts not within their specialties on unjust terms. The dismissed professionals have refused to get back to the posts that did not match their qualifications and know-how. Pro-regime papers, or those papers owned by members from the ruling family, still refuse to reinstate sacked journalists and photographers to their jobs.



• Zakaria Al-Asbeeri



• Karem Fakhrawi

Violations Documentation in the period from the 1st of January until the 23th of April 2012

The BPA issued its first report on the freedom of press and the violations against press professionals covering the period from January 1, 2011 through July 15, 2011. A first of its type ever, the bi-lingual report was received well for the information it has pertaining to the abuses and violations committed against Bahraini and foreigner media professionals amid the popular uprising erupted in February 2011. Another report was released by the BPA at the wake of this year.

The Bahraini Public Persecution withdrew many cases filed against media professionals before criminal courts. It is feared that the Public Persecution will file again such cases before courts or extort media people and journalists. As yet, the Public Persecution refuses to disclose any information pertaining to such trials or grants them a leave-to-file decision.

Below is a summary of the most important violations documented in the period from 1 January to April 23, 2012: .

The following is a summary of the most important violations documented during the year 2012 in the period January 1st 2012 to April 23rd, 2012:

Date	Journalist	Case
2 Jan	Waheed Al Balushi Media professional	Prosecutors began investigation in a case involving the media personal Mr. Waheed Al Balushi on charges of publicly insulting a religious Islamic symbol of praise and reverence among Muslims, after complaints made by The Al Asalah Islamic Society (Salfi Muslim).Mr. AlBalushi has denied the accusations, asserting that the charges were in fact (malicious) and came as an attempt to silence him from criticizing the society.
3 Jan	Mazen Mahdi Journalist	Attack on Mr. Mazen Mahdi the German DPA agency photographer; he was beaten on the head by members of the riot police while covering a sit-in protest in front of a group of people in the vicinity of Smaheej police station adjacent to the Bahrain International Airport (north of the capital Manama)
5 Jan	Reem Khalifa Journalist	Trial of journalist Reem Khalifa continues, and then postponed to January 19th. The defendant's lawyer said that the journalist Reem Khalifa was covering the Irish delegation conference, who visited Bahrain on July 14, 2011, in order to see the status of medical personnel in detention. A number of non-journalist conference attendees were pro-government and repeated harassing phrases in her presence, creating a state of chaos and committed vandalism which caused press the conference to be cancelled. The Irish delegation confirmed the incident of vandalism.
18 Jan	Stephanie Lamour French journalist	Ms. Lamour told Bahrain Mirror "Bahraini E-journal" that she received threatening calls telling her that she "will face serious consequences if she remains in Bahrain"; she has been under surveillance by the security authorities for 3 days. She stressed that a civilian car was hounded wherever she goes, then stops to monitor her movements in front of the hotel in which she stayed. She stated that she was in touch with (Reporters without Borders), which expressed concern and asked her to be careful as Bahrain has been ranked among the ten most dangerous regions in the world for journalists. The BPA was unable to obtain further information.

24 Jan	Dr. Ali Al-Dairi Writer	Writer Dr. Ali Al-Dairi was denied entrance into Egypt and was deported to Lebanon. The BPA considers this an attack on Bahrainis media abroad via black lists sent by the Bahraini authorities to some of the Arab governments.
1 Feb	Waheed Al balushi Media professional	The first court session of Mr. Waheed Al Balushi was adjourned.
2 Feb	Reem Khalifa Journalist	This day marks the first court session for Ms. Khalifa who is considered to be one of the most influential independent journalists in Bahrain. In the same context, journalist Reem Khalifa of Al-Wasat Daily Newspaper still faces regime-led targeting through the continuation of her trial in the Bahraini courts despite many international calls to drop any and all charges against her, the latest of which was the report dated January 24, 2012 (Tunisia/London) issued by (writers in Prison Committee of international PEN, Index on Censorship, Arabic Network for Human Rights Information, IFEX, and the Gulf Centre for Human rights) titled “Denial of justice in Bahrain: Stifle freedom of expression and peaceful assembly,” The report called upon the government of Bahrain in one of its recommendations to stop the said trial against Reem Khalifa and end targeting her whatsoever.
8 Feb	Foreign correspondents	Bahraini authorities refused to grant entry visas to a large number of foreign journalists who wished to cover the anniversary of the revolution of February 14, including: the Los Angeles/New York Times/BBC/Wall Street Journal/Christian Science Montour/AFP/ and Al Jazeera. The authorities also refused to grant the New York Times journalist Nicholas Kristof an entry visa. Mr. Kristof was arrested on December 2011 while he was in the village of Sitra covering the protests, Security forces have smashed the camera belonging to his colleague who was accompanying him.

8 Feb	Mohamed Fadel Journalist	AFP officially announced that the Bahraini authorities have banned the local correspondent (Mr. Mohamed Fadel) from working. This comes as part of a series of measures taken against the foreign press correspondents. According to the agency.
13 Feb	Huwaida Arraf and Radhika Sinat Human Rights Activists	<p>Bahraini authorities expelled two American activists, Ms. Huwaida Arraf and Ms. Radhika Sinat have established “Witness Bahrain” to monitor events on the ground during the eve of the first anniversary of the protests to demand democratic reforms in Bahrain.</p> <p>The Bahrain news agency quoted a Bahraini official in the General Directorate for Immigration saying that “Huwaida Arraf and Radhika Sinat arrived to Bahrain on a tourist visa and have announced that they want to write a report pertaining to demonstrations. They were later stopped after taking part in an illegal demonstration in Manama.”</p> <p>Also, they were attacked in the pro-regime papers after being forcibly expelled from the country, citing religious reasons behind the deportation and commenting on their defense of human rights.</p>
22 Feb	Nazeeha Saeed Journalist	This day marks the first court session as per the case of the torture of the French-24-correspondent Nazeeha Saeed. She was allowed to attend the court session with her lawyer Hamid Almulla, the authorities prevented her family from entry. The session was attended by Lieutenant – Sara Mousa who was accused of torturing Nazeeha with her lawyer Fareed Ghazi and 3 other escorts.
26 Feb	Deceased Zakariya AlAshiri - Blogger	<p>The High Criminal Court looks into the murder of Bahraini blogger Zakaria AlAshiri.</p> <p>Attorney Mohamed AlTajer confirmed that the military court had acquitted five defendants in the case and that the Court of Military Appeals ruled out that the court had no jurisdiction over the case; and hence, the case had to be referred to the civil courts. This indicates that the route of the case might go to the acquaintance of the accused torturers - 5 members of the police who are Pakistani nationals – in clear disregard to and manipulation by the authorities of their commitment to the elimination of the implementation of the recommendations as issued by the BICI (Bassiouni Commission).</p>

4 Mar	Nazeeha Saeed Journalist	Another hearing of the trial of the torturer of Ms. Nazeeha Saeed. The case was referred to the High Criminal Court.
21 Mar	Reem Khalifa Journalist	The First Circuit of Criminal Court looks into the case of journalist Reem Khalifa. The trial was adjourned and scheduled for April 19 for the final verdict.
31 Mar	Deceased Ahmed Ismail Activist & Photographer	Mr. Ahmed Ismail was shot dead in Salmabad as he was covering a peaceful protest in the area. The opposition accuses regime-led thugs and militias of shooting Mr. Ismail. Mr. Ismail is an amateur photographer who used to document protests in Bahrain and distributed his coverage through social networking websites and YouTube. Several news agencies rely on his video clips in their coverage of events in Bahrain.
3 Apr	Mohamed Al Othman Journalist	News leaked that Mr. Mohamed AlOthman was prevent from writing in AlBilad Daily newspaper where he was a columnist. Owned by the premier's eldest son, the daily acts on orders imposed by the Royal Court. Mr. Al Othman's previous articles were removed from the newspaper's website. The BPA was unable to obtain further information in this regard.
8 Apr	Ahmed Al Bosta Journalist	Bahraini security forces assaulted journalist Mr. Ahmed Al Bosta while he happened to be in the Capital City of Manama. Mr. Al Bosta was physically and verbally abused by the forces at the scene. His presence coincided with a peaceful protest; he was arrested, beaten, abused, and insulted with profanity. Mr. Al Bosta was punched and kicked before being released an hour later.

<p>10 April</p>	<p>Ali Al Ali Film Director</p>	<p>The Authority of Information Affairs banned the Bahraini film director Ali Al-Ali from filming a series in the Gulf State of Bahrain under the name «If one night is left», after the production budget and timeline were set.</p>
<p>18 Apr</p>	<p>Nazeeha Saeed Journalist</p>	<p>The final verdict pertaining to Ms. Nazeeha Saeed case of being tortured: The case to be brought back to Public Prosecution.</p>
<p>19 Apr</p>	<p>Reem Khalifa Journalist</p>	<p>In the case of Ms. Reem Khalifa, the First Circuit of Criminal Court ruled out that Ms. Khalifa to be fined BD 600 (around US\$ 1,600)</p> <p>The journalist ReemKhalifa submitted an appeal to her sentence. The appeal has been scheduled for a hearing on September 13 before the High Criminal Court. The judge refused to hear defense witnesses nominated thus ignoring recording of the incident.</p>
<p>20 Apr</p>	<p>Foreign correspondents</p>	<p>Financial Times correspondent Mr. Simon Kerr; a journalist in the Times newspaper journalist Ms. Karen Lee of the American channel CNN; CNN's Amber Lyon and Stewart Ramsey; and chief of correspondents in Sky News were refused entrance into Bahrain.</p> <p>Journalists from the Associated Press news agency were also banned from entering Bahrain despite having obtained a permit to cover the F1 Race from the organizing body (FIA). Authorities said that requests from the Information Authority still be needed.</p> <p>Reuters news agency later reported that its non-sport reporters were banned entry as well, Reuters noted that a number of other correspondents of other media outlets were also denied permits to enter.</p>

<p>21 Apr</p>	<p>Mohamed Hassan Activist</p>	<p>Appearing in an American documentary by Dan Rather presented by Dan Rather, Activist</p> <p>Mr. Mohamed Hassan was arrested. Mr Hassan has received threats via phone calls from the intelligence forces. Mr. Hassan was subjected to physical assault during the detention</p> <p>The representative of the BPA inside Bahrain confirmed that the arrested activist was injured in the village of Bilad Al Qadeem. Mr Hassan was accompanying foreign correspondents. He was transferred to SMC Hospital where he was arrested, and detained by the security authorities for the whole day. He was released in the early hours of Saturday morning. He was arrested again the next morning escorting another foreign reports to be released later on.</p>
<p>22 April</p>	<p>Foreign correspondents</p>	<p>A team of correspondents from the British Channel Four was arrested after the end of the Formula 1 events. The team was composed of reporter Mr. Jonathan Miller, cameraman Joe Sheffer, and producer Dave Fuller.</p> <p>Also arrested were the team's driver, and accompanying human rights activist Dr. Alaa al-Shehabi. The group were arrested while traveling between the villages of Bahrain, Jonathan Miller described the arrest as "barbaric", the driver was beaten violently. The team was deported from the country after an investigation that lasted for six hours.</p> <p>The camera and electronic equipment for the crew were confiscated.</p> <p>Furthermore, Japanese journalists covering protests heading to Bahrain International Circuit, where the Formula 1 is held, were arrested and released later after interrogation.</p>

- *This report is preliminary; the BPA will present more details in its annual report.*

Unfair Judicial Rulings

Judicial rulings issued on the 22nd of June against Dr Abdul Jalil Al Sangaee, a blogger and human rights activist, Ali Abdalemam, a blogger and founder of a political online forum, and Hassan Matouk, a photographer and a nurse, are still a major concern within the media circles inside and outside Bahrain.

Several human rights organizations and watchdogs described such unlawful sentences as abusive for the sentences extended from three years to fifteen years imprisonment. Dr. Abdul Jalil Al Sangaee and Photographer Hassan Matook are currently serving their sentences while Ali Abdulimam was convicted in absentia. Until the moment of drafting this report, no information has been available pertaining to Mr. Abdulemam's whereabouts and whether he had been arrested or not.

Such sentences entirely lack legal due process. Many violations have been in place that touched the violated the defendants' legal rights. The defendant Dr. Al Alsangaee was subjected to torture while in prison given the fact that he is a handicapped. The court sessions were not held as per locally and internationally approved conditions and, thus, represent a grave breach to human rights conventions and treaties of which Bahrain is a signatory.



• *Ali Aldairy*



• *Journalists in Bahrain are still paying the cost of freedom of speech*



• *Abmeed Albustab*



• BPA board during a meeting with IFJ's president Jean Bumilha and NUJ

Conclusion and recommendations

Bahrain Press Association stresses the seriousness of the situation in Bahrain and casts greater concerns regarding the safety of journalists, photographers and bloggers who are subjected to systematic campaigns of intimidation. The Bahraini regime has neither taken any corrective remedies nor implemented reforms based on the recommendations issued by the BICI report. The state continues its repression policies against journalists and cyber activists. It still exercises a complete control over electronic media by blocking many websites, including the London based Al Quds Al Arabi Newspaper, Bahrain Mirror and a number of other prominent web pages.

The BPA is hereby calling upon all organizations, authorities, unions, whether regional or global, concerned with media and journalism along with human rights defenders to intervene into Bahrain and put pressure on the regime to ensure the safety of media personnel in the country. The BPA wishes to have the following procedures in place:

1. To form an independent international committee to investigate into the murder of Blogger Zakariya Al Asheeri and Publisher Kareem Fakhrawi and bring those involved in the murdering to justice;
2. To form an independent international committee to investigate into the torture faced by media professionals in the detention houses managed by the Ministry of Interior's national security department, Bahrain Defence Force, or The National Guards;
3. To call upon the Bahraini regime to ensure the recruitment of a permanent delegate of international organizations concerned with the freedom of the press and media (International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), Reporters Without Borders, the International Freedom of Expression Exchange (IFEX), to function as a watchdog for two years to have a direct supervision on what Bahrain is witnessing as per the violations faced by the media professionals;
4. To suspend the applicability of Law No. 47 pertaining to journalism, print, and publication regulation, the unconditional release of media activists and bloggers who were unfairly charged with crimes related to the freedom of expression and jailed in Bahrain with immediate effect, stop all on-going trials against media professionals being held in the Criminal Courts, review all sentences issued against Bahraini bloggers, and to drop all charges auctioned by the Public Prosecution and leave them to file;
5. To reinstate all dismissed media professionals to their positions in private and public media outlets with fair compensation for the corporeal and incorporeal damages they have sustained since they were arbitrarily dismissed;
6. To separate the external media affairs directorate from the Authority of Information Affairs with the establishment of a temporary committee to regulate journalism and all media-related matters. Such committee shall be run by elected Bahraini journalists until the formation of a higher investigation committee to oversee print and publication; and to establish an independent inquiry committee to investigate the media role as practiced by the Information Authority during the popular uprising in Bahrain and hold those responsible of violations as proved by the BICI accountable; and
7. To stop all repression, trespass, abuse, and intimidation against media professionals and stop all security measures to in order to pave the way to realize a true freedom of the press and the freedom of expression.