

Failed Promises in Bahrain: Human Rights Violations
Linger On

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On the occasion of the third anniversary of the popular uprising that started on February 14, 2011, FIDH urges the Bahraini authorities to take immediate measures to restore the rule of law, to put an end to ongoing human rights violations and to comply with their reiterated pledges before the population of Bahrain and the international community.

"Three years have passed since the protests started and yet the Bahraini authorities continue to fail in their promises of implementing the BICI recommendations, including the release all prisoners of conscience, ending torture and arbitrary detention, and bringing officials responsible for human rights violations to justice", declared Karim Lahidji, FIDH president.

Release of prisoners of conscience

While human rights defenders [\[1\] are serving long-term prison sentences after unfair trials](#), human rights defenders in Bahrain continue to be targeted by the authorities where they face arbitrary arrests, detention, judicial harassment and in several cases, ill-treatment or torture. **Nabeel Rajab**, President of the Bahrain Center for Human Rights (BCHR) and Deputy Secretary General of FIDH, remains detained after having served ¾ of his three year sentence. The [Bahrain Court of Appeals has refused to grant early release](#) contrary to provisions of the Code of Criminal Proceedings. The [UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention's opinion](#) considering Rajab's detention as arbitrary has not been taken into account by the Government of Bahrain. **Zainab Al Khawaja**, human rights defender and democracy activist, [who has been tried in more than 13](#) cases and has been detained since February 2013, was [sentenced again](#) in January 2014 to a further four months' imprisonment on the charge of "destroying government property". In September 2013, **Naji Fateel**, a board member of the Bahrain Youth Society for Human Rights (BYHRS) was sentenced to [15 years imprisonment](#) for "the establishment of a group for the purpose of disabling the constitution" under Article 6 of the Terrorism Act. He was previously sentenced for "illegal gatherings". Fateel was reportedly severely tortured during his detention. **Masooma Al Sayed**, human rights activist, [was sentenced in May 2013](#) to six months' imprisonment for "illegal gathering", "assaulting a female officer" and "inciting hatred against the regime". **Mohammed Al-Maskati**, President of BYSHR, who [appeared](#) before a court on charges of "participation in illegal protests" in June 2013, was [summoned](#) in October 2013 and interrogated on charges of "inciting hatred against the regime", after a speech he made on September 8, 2013 on the concept of non-violence while demanding the respect of universal human rights .

The government of Bahrain should immediately and unconditionally release all human rights defenders and other prisoners of conscience detained for merely exercising legitimate rights and must put an end to all acts of harassment including at the judicial level in conformity with the recommendations of the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry (BICI) of November 2011 and all those addressed at the occasion of the Universal Periodic Review in September 2012.

Lift recent anti-terrorism measures and other laws which violate human rights obligations

Rather than implementing BICI and UPR recommendations, the government of Bahrain decided to strengthen its legislative arsenal that allows further restriction of rights and freedoms. Among the 22 anti-terrorism measures

adopted in August 2013, several measures amount to State of emergency measures including through granting the authorities excessive powers and then allowing them to arbitrarily restrain fundamental rights such as freedom of expression and freedom of association. Among others, this legal reform formally legalized the possibility to revoking Bahrain citizenship from those who "commit the crime of terrorism or incite" to it which was [used earlier against political activists](#). Several of these measures were swiftly implemented. In November 2013, the parliament [amended](#) the law on public gatherings so that all organizers are required to seek official permission to hold assemblies in Manama which constitutes in practice a ban of any sit-in, gathering or demonstration in the capital. In September 2013, the parliament also [amended](#) the law for political societies so that political groups must obtain permission from the government prior to meeting with any foreign diplomats in Bahrain or abroad. The measures also increase the penalty against all those who use websites to publish "false" information and pass them on to foreign agencies.

Put an end to torture and duly investigate torture cases

The practice of torture during arrests and in detention continue to be regularly denounced. However, allegations of torture have been largely ignored by judges, very few investigations have been ordered into such cases and alleged authors of such crimes have not been brought to justice. In this context, there is an urgent need for independent monitoring of the situation such as a visit of the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture. After agreeing to the visit of the Special Rapporteur in 2012, the Bahraini authorities have postponed that visit twice at very short notice, without providing an alternative date. FIDH urges the Bahrain authorities to investigate cases of torture and bring perpetrators to justice and to strengthen its cooperation with UN mechanisms and in particular to schedule a visit of the Special Rapporteur on Torture without any further delay.

Accountability

Gross human rights violations including excessive use of force against peaceful protesters, arbitrary detention and torture committed since 2011 have largely gone unpunished. Despite the pledge by the King of Bahrain made on the occasion of the release of the BICI report "that there will be no impunity", no senior official has been held responsible for the human rights violations committed since 2011; only four low-ranking officers and one first lieutenant have been [convicted](#) in the deaths of two protesters and serious injury to a third. In another case, the appeals court [reduced](#) the sentence of a lieutenant sentenced to seven years imprisonment for the murder of a protester to six months. The government of Bahrain should urgently implement the BICI recommendations no. N1716 and N1722(a)(b) according to which effective investigations of complaints of torture, ill-treatment, excessive use of force, and other abuses at the hands of the authorities must be conducted.

[1] [Political activists were also sentenced to harsh sentences including life imprisonment in 2011](#)