

Bahrain Trials Update

Much of political significance has happened in Bahraini courts over recent months.

Especially welcome is the release from state confinement of Bahrain Center for Human Rights activist, Maryam Al-Khawaja. Originally [arrested in August](#) last year while entering Bahrain to visit her imprisoned father, Maryam was released and left the country after three weeks in detention - only to be sentenced in absentia to a year in prison on 1st December 2014

[more details....](#)

Against this development, October 2014 witnessed two further, closely related and equally politically motivated trials. Maryam's sister, Zainab Al-Khawaja, was arrested shortly after release following a previous sentence. Writing in the UK Guardian newspaper, Maryam summarised her sister's rearrest:

"She was attending a court hearing on charges of 'destroying government property' after tearing a picture of Bahrain's king during a protest in 2012. In court, she took out a picture of the king, and tore it up, declaring: I am the daughter of a proud and free man. My mother brought me into this world free, and I will give birth to a free baby boy even if it is inside our prisons. It is my right, and my responsibility as a free person, to protest against oppression and oppressors."

[full article...](#)

On 4 December, precisely three days after the in absentia sentencing of her sister, Zainab Al-Khawaja received a three year prison sentence for "insulting the king": an outcome which for [Amnesty justifies her recognition as a prisoner of conscience](#). Meanwhile another persistently victimised rights activist, [Nabeel Rajab](#), was given a six month sentence on 20 January this year for tweeting about reported links between Bahraini security service members and the Islamic State organisation. Said Boumedouha of Amnesty responded :

"Nabeel Rajab is being unjustly punished simply for posting tweets deemed insulting to the authorities. His conviction is a blow to freedom of expression – it must be quashed. He should be released immediately and unconditionally"

[Amnesty International statement...](#)

Furthermore, Sayed Alwadaei of the Bahrain Institute for Rights and Democracy observes that the key tweet "*was not without basis*", noting for example that known Islamic State recruit Mohammad Isa Al-Binali was previously employed in the Bahrain Ministry of Interior. Alwadaei adds:

"With the Bahraini government directly sponsoring (pro-Sunni - DB) sectarianism within its security sector, it is no surprise that some of these men have left home to join ISIS. Supporters of ISIS have greater freedom than supporters of democracy. ISIS Supporters have openly requested donations in Bahraini mosques without arousing any government action." [read more...](#)

Other critics and opponents have fallen foul of the regime, its security apparatuses and courts. The arrest on 28 December 2014 of Shaikh Ali Salman, Secretary-General of Shia oriented Al-Wefaq, Bahrain's largest opposition party, was widely [condemned by human rights groups...](#) At the same time, [state revenge against Bahrain Teachers Association Chair](#), Mahdi Abu Deeb, sentenced for ten (reduced to five) years in the aftermath of the Spring 2011 Bahraini reform protests, continues. On 14 October 2014, Amnesty UK director Kate Allen was quoted as saying:

"Mahdi is languishing behind bars simply for calling for a strike - a shocking overreaction from the Bahraini authorities who stopped at almost nothing to crush opposition during the 2011 protests."

[read the statement...](#)

Though obviously intended to intimidate all actual and potential opposition, it seems equally clear that these are the acts of a regime seriously anxious about its own future - even with Gulf Cooperation Council support, as well as the US Fifth Fleet close at hand and a British military base in the planning pipeline. Bearing in mind both the long term anti-democratic regional impact of divide-and-rule imperialism, nurturing destabilising internecine antagonisms, and the savage mayhem arising specifically from recent western interventions in Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya, among other places, the Al Khalifas may have a point.

by David Binns (UCU London Retired Members)