



General Assembly

Distr.: General
5 September 2017

English only

Human Rights Council

Thirty-sixth session

11-29 September 2017

Agenda item 4

Human rights situations that require the Council's attention

Written statement* submitted by the Americans for Democracy & Human Rights in Bahrain Inc, a non- governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[18 August 2017]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

GE.17-15364(E)



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Continued Restrictions on Fundamental Freedoms and Persecution of Rights Defenders in the GCC

Introduction

Americans for Democracy & Human Rights in Bahrain (ADHRB) would like to take this opportunity at the 36th session of the United Nations Human Rights Council to discuss widespread human rights abuses throughout the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), including continued restrictions of fundamental freedoms and the continued harassment and detention of human rights defenders and peaceful dissidents.

In **Saudi Arabia**, the government has continued its military action in Awamiyah and has sharply increased the number of prisoners on death row and at risk of imminent executions. In **Kuwait**, the stateless *Bidoon* population continues to face ongoing discrimination. In **Oman**, the government has not halted its suppression of press freedoms or freedom of expression. The **Emirati** government has jailed peaceful dissidents Ahmed Mansoor and Dr. Nasser bin Ghaith. On 5 June, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) severed diplomatic ties with **Qatar**, raising concerns about large-scale human rights violations.

Saudi Arabia

On 10 May 2017, Saudi security forces entered the Eastern Province town of Awamiyah to demolish the ancient al-Mosawara neighborhood. In the ensuing violence, security forces are using excessive and indiscriminate force against civilians and they have blockaded the town, cutting it off from the surrounding villages. Due to concerns over widespread rights violations, the Special Rapporteurs on poverty, housing, and cultural rights have twice called on Saudi Arabia to halt the demolition of al-Mosawara, highlighting the destruction of cultural heritage, evictions of residents, a shortage of housing, and concerns over poverty. Security forces' excessive and indiscriminate use of force against residents has led to reports of extrajudicial, arbitrary, and summary killings of civilians.

Saudi Arabia has increased the number of executions and the number of prisoners at risk of execution in recent months. On Tuesday 11 July, the Saudi government executed four men who had been convicted of participating in peaceful protests. The men had been tortured and forced to confess. On 24 July, the government moved 14 men at imminent risk of execution to Riyadh, signaling that authorities are preparing for their execution. The men had been sentenced to death for participating in peaceful protests after being tortured. On 25 July, an appeals court upheld the death sentences of 15 men who had been convicted in a December 2016 espionage trial that was marred by gross due process violations and torture allegations.

Kuwait

Kuwait continues to discriminate against its more than 100,000 *Bidoon* residents by denying them Kuwaiti nationality, making them ineligible for the generous benefits the state offers its citizens.¹ While the government offered the *Bidoon* some reforms in 2011, many *Bidoon* argue that bureaucratic barriers make it difficult to actually receive the benefits.² Since February 2011, there have been large protests calling for the government to extend citizenship rights to the *Bidoon* community. However, the government has forcibly suppressed these protests.³

1 "Kuwait: Events of 2016," Human Rights Watch, Accessed 14 August 2017, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2017/country-chapters/kuwait>.

2 Adam Taylor, "The Controversial Plan to Give Kuwait's Stateless People Citizenship of a Tiny, Poor African Island," *Washington Post*, 17 May 2016, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2016/05/17/the-controversial-plan-to-give-kuwaitis-stateless-people-citizenship-of-a-tiny-poor-african-island/?utm_term=.7c154a3c5ef1.

3 "Kuwait: Discrimination of Bedoon Community," Gulf Center for Human Rights (GCHR), 28 July 2017, <http://www.gc4hr.org/news/view/1654>.

Kuwaiti authorities have targeted *Bidoon* activists because of their work, like Abdulhakim al-Fadhli, who has been arrested repeatedly for his activism.⁴ While he was released on 1 August 2017, he was forced to sign a declaration stating he would not participate in any future protests.⁵ Security forces also continue to monitor and harass activists like Nawaf al-Hendal of Kuwait Watch, Abdunnasser al-Fadhli – the brother of Abdulhakim al-Fadhli – and Rana al-Sadoun.⁶

Oman

Through 2016 and 2017, the Omani government has systematically suppressed press freedoms, arresting activists who have written critically about the government. On 9 August 2016, Omani authorities ordered the *Azamn* newspaper to close after the paper published a series of articles accusing senior judicial figures of corruption. Authorities also arrested *Azamn*'s deputy editor, Yousef al-Haj on 28 July 2016, making him the third *Azamn* journalist detained.⁷

On 17 April 2017, Oman's Internal Security Service (ISS) detained human rights defender Ahmed al-Bahri and Internet activist Khalid al-Ramadani. Both had posted comments on their Facebook pages that were critical about Oman's security forces and government corruption.⁸ On 3 May 2017 – World Press Freedom Day – the ISS ordered the blocking of the online journal and magazine *Mowaten*.⁹ On 23 May 2017, a court ruled writer Mansour al-Mahrazi was guilty of “insulting the Sultan” and “undermining the status of the country” after he published two books on government corruption in Oman. He was sentenced to three years in prison.¹⁰

United Arab Emirates

On March 20, Emirati authorities detained Ahmed Mansour, later charging him with “using social media sites like Twitter and Facebook to publish false information, rumors, and lies about the UAE and promoting sectarian feelings and hatred that would damage the UAE's social harmony and unity.”¹¹ The charges stem from Mansour's call for the release of peaceful dissident Osama al-Najjar – who remained in prison despite having completed his three year sentence for peaceful Twitter activities – and his criticism of the ongoing detention of Dr. Nasser bin Ghaith. Mansour had also criticized human rights violations in Egypt and concerning the Saudi-led war in Yemen.¹² Mansour was sentenced in a secret trial and 28 June 2017 marked the 100th day of his prison sentence.

On 29 March 2017, the Abu Dhabi Court of Appeals issued its final verdict against Dr. Nasser bin Ghaith. Because of his activism, the Emirati government arrested bin Ghaith without charge in August 2015 and forcibly disappeared him for eight months. After he reappeared in April 2016, he was incarcerated in solitary confinement. On 29 March 2017,

4 “Kuwait: Prominent Bedoon human rights defender Abdulhakim Al-Fadhli must be released,” Gulf Center for Human Rights, 14 July 2017, <http://www.gc4hr.org/news/view/1650>; “Kuwait: Discrimination of Bedoon Community,” GCHR.

5 “Kuwait: Human rights defender Abdulhakim Al-Fadhli released,” Gulf Center for Human Rights, 4 August 2017, <http://www.gc4hr.org/news/view/1660>.

6 “Kuwait: Discrimination of Bedoon Community,” GCHR.

7 “Oman: Newspaper Shuttered, Editor Held: 3 Journalists Arrested Since Late July,” Human Rights Watch, 13 August 2016, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/08/13/oman-newspaper-shuttered-editor-held>.

8 “Oman: Internal Security Service continues systematic targeting of human rights defenders & Internet activists,” Gulf Center for Human Rights, 24 April 2017, <http://www.gc4hr.org/news/view/1561>.

9 “Oman: “Mowaten” Magazine's website blocked on World Press Freedom Day,” Gulf Center for Human Rights, 5 May 2017, <http://www.gc4hr.org/news/view/1582>.

10 “Oman: Writer Mansour Al-Mahrazi sentenced to three years in prison,” Gulf Center for Human Rights, 24 May 2017, <http://www.gc4hr.org/news/view/1600>.

11 “UAE government arrests internationally-acclaimed human rights defender Ahmed Mansoor,” Americans for Democracy & Human Rights in Bahrain, 20 March 2017, <http://www.adhrb.org/2017/03/uae-government-arrests-internationally-acclaimed-human-rights-defender-ahmed-mansoor/>.

12 “Rights groups call for UAE gov to release HRD Ahmed Mansoor,” Americans for Democracy & Human Rights in Bahrain, 20 April 2017, <http://www.adhrb.org/2017/04/rights-groups-call-uae-gov-release-hrd-ahmed-mansoor/>.

the Court of Appeals sentenced him to ten years in prison.¹³ On 2 April 2017, Dr. bin Ghaith announced the he would begin a hunger strike to protest his verdict.¹⁴

Qatar

On 5 June 2017, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and the UAE cut off diplomatic relations with Qatar leading to widespread human rights violations stemming from restrictions on movement, like the denial of medical treatment and separation of family members.

Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and the UAE expelled all Qatari citizens from their countries and ordered their nationals to return from Qatar, leading to separations of families with multiple nationalities. Due to restrictions on movement between Qatar and Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and the UAE, family members have been prevented from visiting sick or elderly parents, while others have been cut off from pregnant wives or young children. In addition, the restrictions on movement have caused interruptions in medical treatment. Some Qatari nationals have also been unable to attend scheduled surgeries because of travel restrictions to Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Bahrain. Some patients rely on specialized treatment in other GCC countries that they cannot receive in Qatar.¹⁵

Recommendations

ADHRB calls on the Government of Saudi Arabia to:

- Immediately withdraw from Awamiyah and compensate the residents who have been evicted or whose houses have been destroyed; and
- Impose a moratorium on all executions with a view to the abolition of the death penalty and commute all death sentences.

ADHRB calls on the Government of Kuwait to:

- Stop targeting Bedoon activists and release those who are imprisoned; and
- Grant Bedoon Kuwait citizenship.

ADHRB calls on the Government of Oman to:

- Rescind the closure of the *Azamn* and *Mowaten* newspapers; and
- Release all journalists, writers, and Internet activists imprisoned because of their expression.

ADHRB calls on the Government of the United Arab Emirates to:

- Release Dr. Nasser bin Ghaith and Ahmed al-Mansoor and halt the targeting of activists who exercise their right to free expression and opinion.

13 “UAE Sentences Dr. Nasser bin Ghaith to 10 Years in Prison,” Americans for Democracy & Human Rights in Bahrain, 29 March 2017, <http://www.adhrb.org/2017/03/uae-sentences-dr-nasser-bin-ghaith-10-years-prison/>.

14 “Imprisoned Dr. Nasser bin Ghaith reportedly begins hunger strike,” Americans for Democracy & Human Rights in Bahrain, 18 April 2017, <http://www.adhrb.org/2017/04/imprisoned-dr-nasser-bin-ghaith-reportedly-begins-hunger-strike/>.

15 “Qatar: Isolation Causing Rights Abuses,” Human Rights Watch, 12 July 2017, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/07/13/qatar-isolation-causing-rights-abuses>.