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**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,
political, economic, social and cultural rights,
including the right to development**

Written statement* submitted by 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.

[19 August 2022]

* Issued as received, in the language of submission only.



Politics Prisoners Crisis in Bahrain

Americans for Democracy & Human Rights in Bahrain Inc (ADHRB) welcomes this opportunity at the 51st session of the United Nations (UN) Human Rights Council (HRC) to draw attention to the ongoing mistreatment of political prisoners in Bahrain. Since the pro-democracy movement began in 2011, the Bahraini government has detained, forcibly disappeared, tortured, and killed a number of journalists, political opponents, religious figures, and human rights defenders that have been critical of the government. Once detained, political prisoners and prisoners of conscience within Bahrain are subjected to a multitude of abuses. These grave violations of the human rights of political prisoners are a violation of international law and also in direct violation of the Mandela Rules.

Overview

Bahrain's ongoing attempts to criminalize free speech and free expression have been a significant cause for concern within the international community, with the government showing particular disregard for civil and political rights. Bahraini security forces have continued to regularly detain and abuse government critics, journalists, activists, and religious leaders, subjecting them to police brutality, lengthy prison terms and arbitrary denaturalization. As a result, the government currently holds approximately 1,500 political prisoners and continues to incarcerate individuals on charges related solely to freedom of expression, assembly, and association.

These wrongfully detained political prisoners were already subjected to abuses, torture, mistreatment, and lack of adequate access to medical care prior to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the onset of the pandemic has greatly worsened their current situations and has made their immediate release of paramount importance. In a letter sent by eight UN Special Rapporteurs to the Bahraini government, the experts document a range of abuses perpetrated by prison staff, including medical negligence, religious discrimination, and harassment that are in violation of several international human rights treaties including the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (UNSMRTP) – also known as the Nelson Mandela Rules.

In March 2020, the Bahraini Interior Ministry released 1,486 detainees for “humanitarian reasons” due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and granted approximately 900 of them royal pardon, while 585 were given non-custodial sentences. However, political prisoners only accounted for a mere 300 of those released, and none of them included any prominent political leaders or human rights defenders.

In light of the above, ADHRB will concentrate on the cases of Hasan Mushaima and Dr. Abduljalil AlSingace, as their undue suffering is representative of the broader mistreatment that political prisoners are subjected to, and the violations of the Mandela Rules that such mistreatment entails.

Hassan Mushaima

Hassan Mushaima is the leader of the political opposition in Bahrain. Mushaima was a founding member of Al Wefaq – which was the largest political opposition movement prior to its government dissolution in 2016 – and has been leading pro-democracy figure since his involvement in the 1994 uprising in Bahrain. He has been serving his life sentence in Jau Prison since 2011, after being charged with offenses directly related to his peaceful involvement in pro-democracy demonstrations. During his imprisonment, authorities have been subjecting the 74-year-old to maltreatment and medical negligence. In September 2021, Hassan refused alternative sentencing and thus remains incarcerated after already being unjustly imprisoned for ten years.

Since his imprisonment, Mushaima has faced various restrictions and been denied his basic rights, including adequate health treatment. He is in cancer remission and suffers from many chronic diseases including high blood pressure and diabetes and has been denied medication and regular checkups for prolonged periods, despite several specialist evaluations indicating

that he requires regular treatment and follow-up. His diabetes and blood pressure medicines are not provided consistently, and painkillers and medicinal drugs were also not adjusted to his needs. Moreover, prison officials have forced Mushaima to attend health checks in humiliating shackles, which he has refused to wear, and which has further resulted in him being denied medical treatment.

In May 2021, after being quarantined for 2 months on the pretext of receiving care, Mushaima developed new symptoms due to diabetes including abnormal swelling of feet with black spots, large swelling in his leg, severe knee pain, limping, and difficulty moving. Two months later, in July 2021, he was moved to Kanoo Medical Center, where he remains. His tests showed extremely high blood sugar and blood pressure levels. He also suffers from undetermined damage to his kidneys and stomach, a cyst on his eye, and a cardiac muscle disorder. However, he has consistently been denied the appropriate treatment and as a result continues to suffer from medical complications, many of which are entirely avoidable. Further contributing to his deteriorating condition, Mushaima has also been subjected to punitive measures and stifling psychological pressure.

Dr. Abduljalil AlSingace

Abduljalil AlSingace is a professor, mechanical engineer, blogger, and human rights activist. Al-Singace was sentenced to life in prison in 2011 for his participation in the peaceful pro-democracy movement. AlSingace suffers from numerous chronic medical conditions, including poliomyelitis, which has left him paralyzed since childhood. Despite a long medical history of health issues, Bahraini officials have consistently denied AlSingace access to the appropriate medical, and prison authorities have routinely subjected him to torture and sexual abuse. In June 2021, the Jau Prison administration refused to replace the rubber padding on his crutches, thereby forced him to use the worn-out ones that are uncomfortable and made him slip repeatedly. Only after much international advocacy did the authorities accept to replace the paddings; notably, on 22 June 2021, the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders issued a statement raising alarm at the prolonged imprisonment of Dr. AlSingace and calling for his release along with other human rights defenders imprisoned in Bahrain.

The systemic and cruel mistreatment that AlSingace has been subjected to has resulted in a significant deterioration of his health and, in combination with the unwarranted confiscation of his apolitical research, has prompted him to go on several hunger strikes in protest. AlSingace has been on a hunger strike on 8 July 2021, over 350 days, and his health has deteriorated significantly. He was taken to a hospital then transferred to Kanoo medical center, where he was documented as experiencing headaches, vertigo episodes, and shortness of breath. His hands were unusually cold and swollen, and his oxygen levels had dropped to alarmingly low levels. Doctors have neglected his situation, visiting him only once per 2 or 3 weeks, and his request for painkillers is frequently delayed.

Violations of Nelson Mandela Rules

The cases of Hassan Mushaima and Abuljalil AlSingace indicate several aspects of the Mandela Rules which have been clearly violated by the Bahraini Government in its treatment of political prisoners. Firstly, the torture and abuse experiences by the detained persons and the lack of accountability for such actions outlined above is in direct violation of Rules 1, 37, 39, 43 and 71 of the Mandela Rules. These rules prohibit the use of torture and other cruel and degrading treatment and mandate that investigations must be conducted by the relevant authorities if such abuses do occur. Additionally, the lack of access to adequate medical care experienced by the detained human rights defenders, and the use of humiliating restraints such as shackles is in violation of Rules 5, 25.1, 27, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 42, 46, 47, 48, and 49.

Evidently, the culture of impunity which characterizes the human rights crisis in Bahrain extends to its prison system. Moreover, this systemic culture of impunity is unlikely to improve without ongoing pressure from the international community, given that the advent

of a global pandemic has only worsened the government's mistreatment of imprisoned human rights defenders.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The cruel and inhumane prison conditions and treatment that political prisoners have been subjected to in Bahrain is not only in direct violation of international humanitarian law but also in direct violation of the Nelson Mandela Rules which govern the minimum standards of treatment of prisoners.

Therefore, ADHRB urges the Government of Bahrain to:

- Immediately drop all charges against human rights defenders targeted for their activism;
- Unconditionally release all political prisoners detained without charge or on the basis of false accusations;
- Ensure the provision of adequate and necessary medical care for all prisoners;
- Conduct independent and impartial investigations into allegations of mistreatment and torture, and hold those responsible to account;
- End the systemic campaign of reprisals against human rights defenders; and
- Take immediate steps to end the culture of impunity in Bahrain.

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