



**Bahrain:  
Authorities  
Suppress  
Popular  
Celebration of  
Bahrain's  
Independence  
Day**

## Introduction

Since 2009, it has become the custom to carry out peaceful protests demanding self-determination on 14 August in celebration of Bahrain's Independence Day. On 14 August 1971, Bahrain was announced as an independent sovereign Arab country, free from the British occupation. This historic decision was issued by the United Nations to crown the struggle and sacrifices of the people of Bahrain to obtain their right to self-determination.

From 2009 and beyond, this day has witnessed the presence of security forces countrywide. They routinely suppressed all protests using shotgun pellets and tear gas which caused injuries among protesters that ranged in severity. In addition, protesters have been arrested for the charge of illegal assembly. The authorities in Bahrain do not hold any kind of celebration on this day.

On 13 August 2010, the authorities launched the most repressive campaign in the history of Bahrain, which started with the arrest of the activist Dr. AbdulJalil Al-Singace because he "was intending to organize an event on the so-called National Day of the Kingdom of Bahrain in this month."<sup>1</sup> The authorities in Bahrain claimed that it was "to promote national division" and proceeded to arrest hundreds of activists and dissidents, who were detained for months. They were released during the temporary period of breakthrough in February 2011, as a result of the popular uprising; but it was short-lived and soon was brutally suppressed, with many more arrests following.

In 2013, a group of citizens announced the formation of the "Tamarod" (Rebellion) group that set 14 August 2013 to be the start to its activities. The Bahrain Center for Human Rights (BCHR) documented a fast escalation of violations by the authorities a month and a half before the start date. There were reports of an increase in violence, arbitrary arrests, house raids, and blocking villages with barbed wires and cement barriers<sup>2</sup>. Also, the Bahraini authorities passed new to restrict opposition activities<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.alwasatnews.com/2899/news/read/465571/1.html>

<sup>2</sup> <http://bchr.hopto.org/ar/node/6311>

<sup>3</sup> <http://bchr.hopto.org/ar/node/6309>



Photos of violations by security personnel to suppress peaceful marches and popular revolt on 14 August 2013

## Events of 14 February 2015

On Friday, 14 August 2015, youth groups called for peaceful demonstrations in villages and cities all around Bahrain. They also announced a unified protest that will head to the Pearl Square, at the same time demanding political reforms and guarantee of human rights. BCHR prepared for the day by having its Monitoring and Documentation Team present in these villages and cities to document violations from the ground. Below is the summary of what has been documented so far:



### **Suppression of Peaceful Protests:**

Security forces were in a state of high alert in most villages and towns, especially those close to the Pearl Roundabout. In Sanabis and Daih, security forces were heavily deployed, checkpoints were set up, and roads and streets were closed by cement road blockers to prevent protesters from these two villages from reaching the Pearl Roundabout.

Moreover, BCHR documented more than 20 peaceful protests and at least five of these protests were suppressed using tear gas and shotgun pellets. The biggest protest was one that set off from Daih, a village close to the Pearl Roundabout. However, security forces dispersed protesters with extensive use of tear gas.



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### **Injuries:**

The unjustified violence used by the security forces to suppress peaceful demonstrations results in the increase of casualties. BCHR documented at least six injuries caused by shotgun pellets and dozens of suffocation conditions caused by tear gas. A family told BCHR that security forces raided their house and subjected two of their sons to beating and humiliation for no reason.



Shotgun Pellets Injuries



Two young men were injured after being subjected to beating at the hand of security forces

### **Arrests:**

The authorities in Bahrain continue to consider peaceful protests to be in violation of its laws; despite the fact that it is an internationally guaranteed right according to covenants and conventions ratified by Bahrain. BCHR documented the arrest of five individuals, of whom three were released later.

### **Social Media Attacks On Demonstrators:**

Sectarian discourse started early ahead against demonstrators. BCHR has documented a remark posted by a government loyalist on Twitter that used sectarian words and accused protesters of immoral practices<sup>4</sup>.

Activists circulated on social media photos of a police vehicle catching fire. They said that it was caused by electrical fault. However, the Ministry of Interior said in its statement that the fire was caused by protesters who attacked the vehicle with Molotov cocktails. Videos were disseminated over Twitter of worshipers from the mosque nearby helping to put out the fire. BCHR could not investigate the matter in person.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://twitter.com/karehhum/status/631405929372626944>





## Conclusion

BCHR believes that all the repressive practices that were documented on the past few days and today are direct violations of international conventions that were signed and ratified by Bahrain. In particular they violate the right to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly, guaranteed by Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states that "everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek information and ideas, receive and impart any media and regardless of frontiers;" and by Article 21 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which states: "The right of peaceful assembly shall be recognized. No restrictions may be placed on the exercise of this right other than those imposed in conformity with the law and which are necessary in a democratic society in the interests of national security or public safety, public order (ordre public), the protection of public health or morals or the protection of the rights and freedoms of others."

**Therefore, BCHR urges the United States, the United Kingdom, the United Nations, and all allies and other related institutions to call on the Government of Bahrain to do the following:**

- Immediately end all human rights violations,
- Protect all human rights, in particular the right to free expression and peaceful assembly,
- Reform the executive institutions engaged in violations, especially security forces,
- Abolish laws that restrict freedoms and punish people for exercising their rights in violation of international standards,
- Reform the judiciary, which lacks independence and impartiality,
- Reform the parliament to carry out a real legislative and regulatory role and contribute to the decrease of human rights violations, and
- Encourage ruling through reason and dialogue in order to end the state of security and political tension in the country which violates civil, political, economic, and social policies.