



BAHRAIN CENTER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

Defending and promoting human rights in Bahrain

Faces of Torture in Bahrain



Six years ago today, I was standing at a small sit-in Bahrain along with leading human rights defendants Nabeel Rajab, President of the Bahrain Center for Human Rights (BCHR), to express solidarity with the victims of torture, and to demand accountability for those responsible for that crime. Today, as I speak to you of torture in Bahrain, I see how the situation has not only worsened, but deteriorated to the level that even those who have strongly fought to end torture crimes, persons like Rajab, are now languishing behind prison bars in Bahrain.

On the **International Day in Support of Victims of Torture**, 26 June, BCHR considers it vital to take stock of developments or rather, the lack thereof, regarding efforts to end the use of torture and ill-treatment within the Kingdom of Bahrain. We released a report, “From 2011 to 2016, The Screams of Torture Still Echo”, documenting our findings.

What has happened since 2011 when tens of thousands of Bahraini citizens



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peacefully demanded democratic reforms and human rights in Bahrain? As many of you might be aware, the demonstrations were met with a violent crackdown, which in return received both international attention and condemnation.

In response to growing international pressure, the Government of Bahrain set up the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry (BICI), which conducted more than 9,000 interviews to investigate the events that took place that year. In its report, which was released in November 2011, the BICI found that:

- Many detainees had been subjected to torture and other forms of physical and psychological abuse while in custody; five of whom died as a result of torture. I was a prisoner of conscience in Bahrain, and a witness to one of these deaths, specifically the blogger Zakariya Al-Ashiri who was beaten to death by prison guards. After my release, I testified in court about what I had seen and heard. However, all five policemen who were put on trial for killing Al-Ashiri were acquitted and Al-Ashiri's brutal death went unpunished.
- The most common techniques for mistreatment included blindfolding; handcuffing; enforced standing for prolonged periods; beating; punching; hitting the detainee with rubber hoses (including on the soles of the feet), cables, whips, metal, wooden planks or other objects; electrocution; sleep-deprivation; exposure to extreme temperatures; verbal abuse; threats of rape; and insulting the detainee's religious sect.
- The cases of torture was found to be evidence of a deliberate practice, which in some cases was aimed at extracting confessions and statements under duress, while in others it was intended for the purpose of retribution and punishment.
- Additionally, the Commission found that the lack of accountability for alleged crimes of torture and ill-treatment had led to a culture of impunity.

As documented by BCHR, the practice of systematic torture didn't end after the BICI report, as the Bahraini authorities continued to subject detainees to torture and ill-treatment between the years 2012 and 2015 and using methods very much similar to those described by BICI.

The government of Bahrain currently has seven outstanding visit requests by the UN Special Procedure mandate holders. The Special Rapporteur on Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman and Degrading Treatment or Punishment has had his visit cancelled twice by the Bahraini authorities.

On this occasion, BCHR has released a new report that presents new allegations of torture and ill-treatment. The testimonies from family members and former detainees suggest that torture and ill-treatment continue as a common practice in Bahrain. The alleged new cases of torture together with the number of incidents and



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earlier reports documenting the use of torture by Bahraini security forces opposes the government of Bahrain's claims to have put an end to torture by its officials. As a matter of fact, the new allegation of torture suggests that the security forces seem to make use of some of the same techniques previously documented.

Extremely worrying is the issuance of death penalties by Bahraini courts in cases where the sentences seem to be solely based on confessions obtained through the use of torture:

- **Mohammed Ramadan** and **Husain Ali Moosa** have been sentenced to death based on such coerced confessions that were allegedly extracted under torture. Bahrain's Court of Cassation rejected their appeal on 15 November 2015. This means that, absent of a royal pardon, the government may carry out their execution at any time.
- On 31 May 2016, the death sentences for **Sami Mushaima**, **Abbas Al-Samea**, and **Ali Al-Singace** were upheld. According to their lawyer, there has been a clear violation of the defendants' legal right to due process; this includes credible allegations of torture.

Based on victims' testimonies, coerced confessions are being used as the basis of investigations - confessions that are used in trials, which result in convictions, which tend to be out of proportion and in breach of both national and international legislation.

The number of torture allegations brought forward suggests that the use of torture and ill-treatment has amounted to a *systematic practice*. This needs to be dealt with by the authorities.

BCHR urges all stakeholders to seriously consider what steps should be taken to address the highly worrying situation in which even minors are allegedly subjected to torture, and inhumane and degrading ill-treatment, something which seems to be condoned by the authorities in Bahrain.