

# Overview of Human Rights Violations in Bahrain

January - June 2017

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Arbitrary arrests, human rights marches, politically motivated sentences and reprisals against human rights activists



**BAHRAIN CENTER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS**  
*Defending and promoting human rights in Bahrain*

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# 1. About Us

The Bahrain Center for Human Rights (BCHR) is a non-profit, non-governmental organization, registered with the Bahraini Ministry of Labor and Social Services since July 2002. Despite an order by the authorities in November 2004 to close down, BCHR is still functioning after gaining a wide local and international support for its struggle to promote human rights in Bahrain.

The vast majority of our operations are carried out in Bahrain, while a small office in exile, founded in 2011, is maintained in Copenhagen, Denmark, to coordinate our international communication and assist in the international advocacy program. For more than 13 years, BCHR has carried out numerous projects, including advocacy, online security training, workshops, seminars, media campaigns and reporting to UN mechanisms and international NGOs. BCHR has also participated in many regional and international conferences and workshops in addition to testifying in national parliaments across Europe, the EU parliament, and the United States Congress.

BCHR has received a number of awards for its efforts to promote democracy and human rights in Bahrain. The current President is Nabeel Rajab, who has been jailed repeatedly, including most recently on 13 June 2016 for speeches and social media statements. He has been held in pre-trial detention for over a year now, while a Bahraini Court recently sentenced him to two years in prison due to televised interviews where he criticized human rights violations in Bahrain. His recent arrest has been criticized by a number of human rights organizations, the governments of the UK, the USA and France, as well as a number of UN dignitaries, including former UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon, who have called for his release. Most of the staff inside Bahrain remain anonymous, including a second Vice-President and members of the Documentation Team.

**Our Mission:** To encourage and support individuals and groups to be proactive in the protection of their own and others' rights; and to struggle to promote democracy and human rights in accordance with international norms. To document and report on human rights violations in Bahrain. To use this documentation for advocacy to influence international policies according to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

For more information on our work, please visit our website and donate through: [www.bahrainrights.org](http://www.bahrainrights.org)

## 2. Introduction

The first six months of 2017 have seen increasing instances of intimidation and reprisals against human rights defenders<sup>1</sup>, journalists<sup>2</sup>, and active members of civil society in Bahrain. Amid the heightened crackdown on critical voices the Bahraini government has regressed to a near total suppression of human rights. The Bahrain Center for Human (BCHR) has documented increased numbers of individuals arbitrarily arrested, an increased number of protests, a significant number of citizenship revocation orders, and the end of an unofficial moratorium on the death penalty. All major opposition parties have now been dissolved, and stripped of their assets<sup>3</sup>. Peaceful protesters have died from injuries sustained at the hands of security forces, and many have been injured by the security forces' use of birdshot pellets and tear gas<sup>4</sup>.

## 3. Statistics

BCHR is gravely concerned about these recent developments in Bahrain, and the ongoing and increasingly severe and volatile crackdown on human rights defenders, members of the political opposition, journalists, and active members of civil society in the country.

Between 1 January and 30 June 2017 BCHR has recorded a total of **982** arbitrary arrests in Bahrain. Of these **84** were children, and **28** were women. During a raid on the town of Duraz by Bahraini security forces a total of **286** individuals were arrested from the area on two days in May alone.

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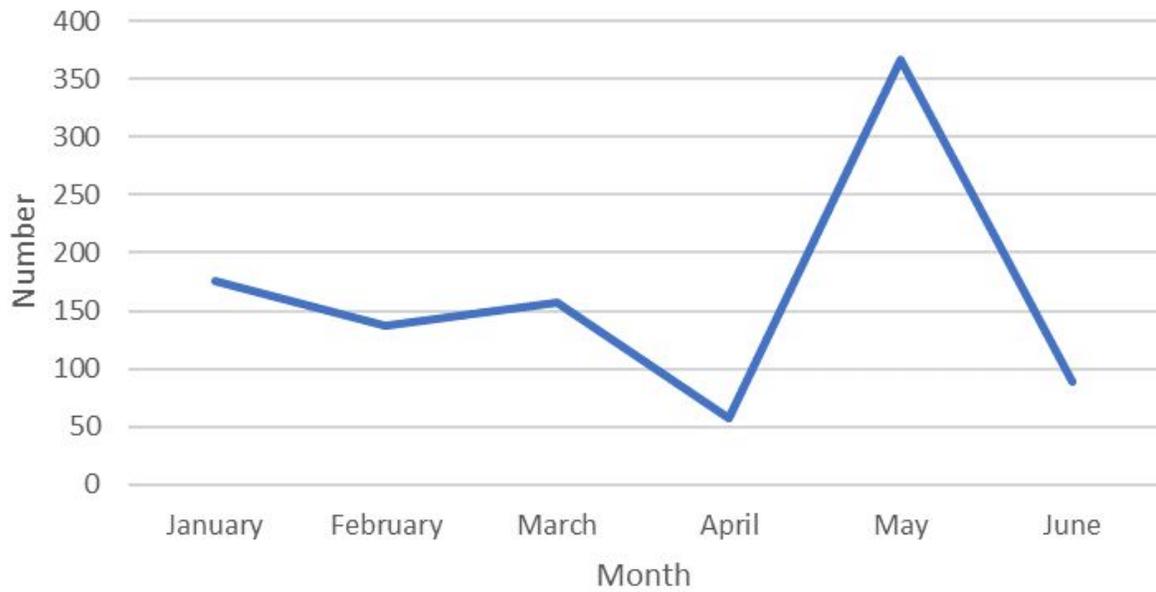
<sup>1</sup> Bahrain Center for Human Rights, 01.05.2017 Human Rights Defender Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja on Hunger Strike for 18 Days <http://www.bahrainrights.org/en/node/8719>

<sup>2</sup> Bahrain Center for Human Rights, 12.01.2017 Trial of Radio Monte Carlo Doualiya's Reporter Nazeeha Saeed Begins Monday <http://www.bahrainrights.org/en/node/8423>

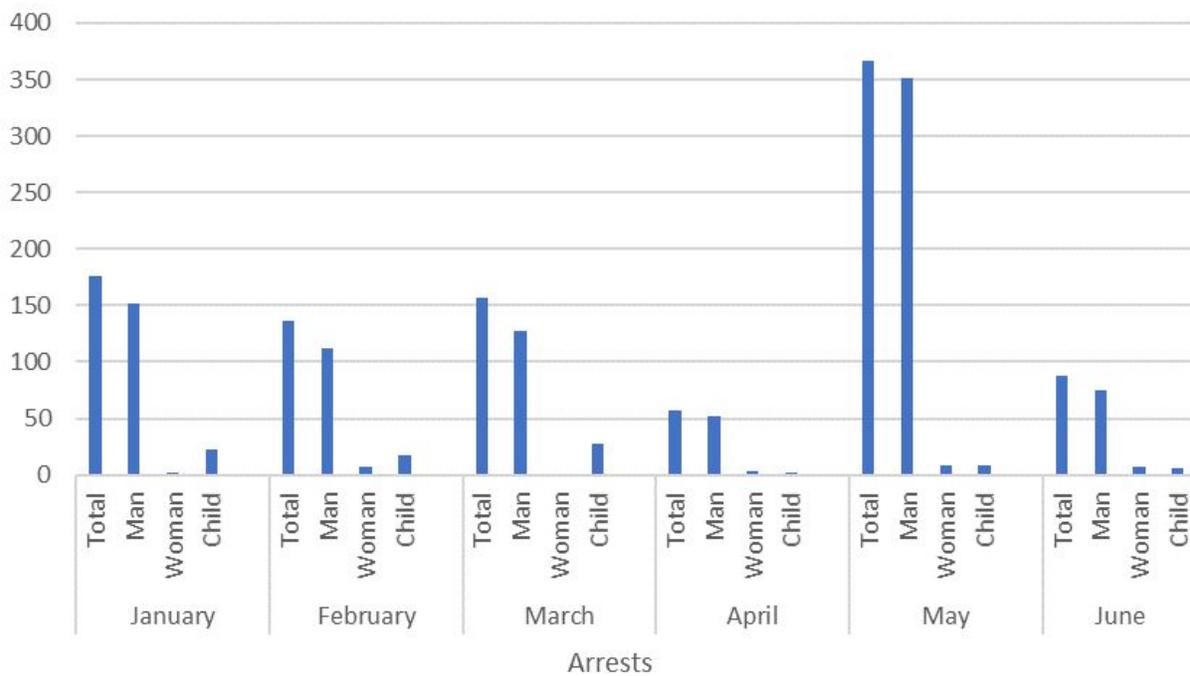
<sup>3</sup> Bahrain Center for Human Rights, 02.06.2017 Bahrain's High Civil Court Orders the Dissolution of Last Major Opposition group Wa'ad <http://www.bahrainrights.org/en/node/8799>

<sup>4</sup> Bahrain Center for Human Rights, 23.05.2017 Deadly Attacks in Duraz Following the Sentencing of Sheikh Isa Qasim <http://bahrainrights.org/en/node/8774>

### 1 January - 30 June: Arbitrary Arrests



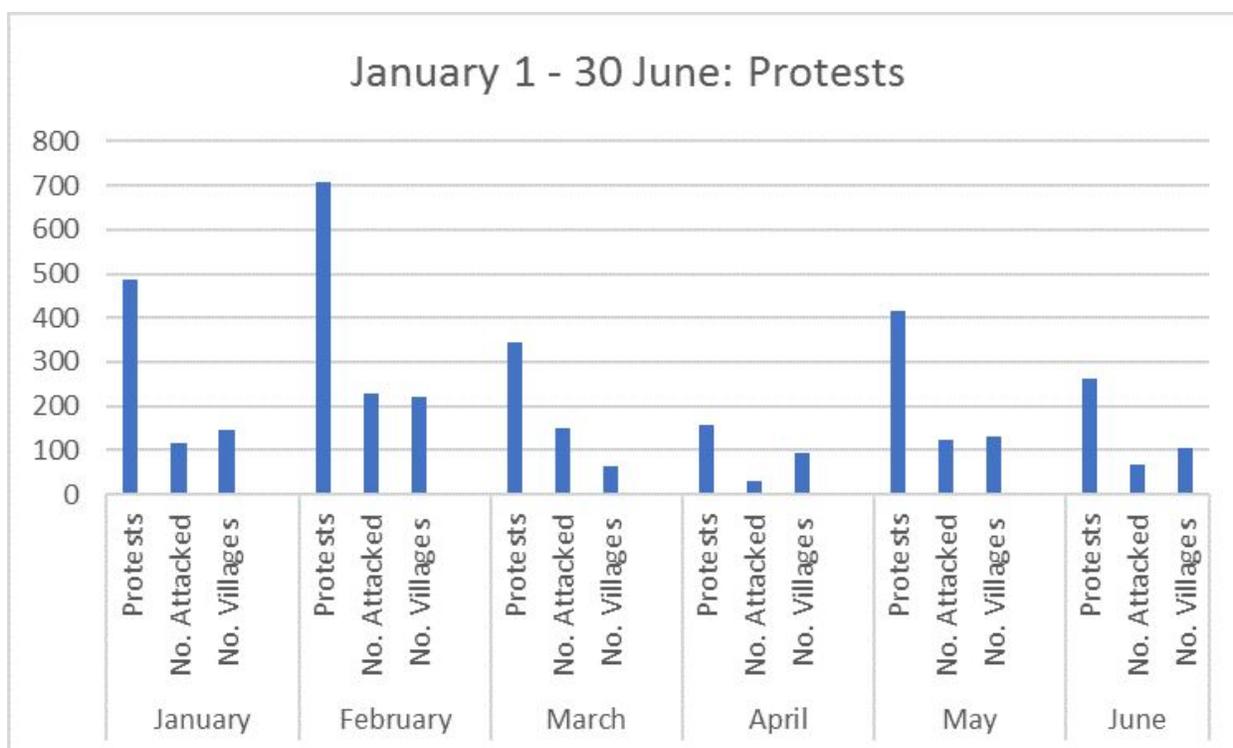
### 1 January - 30 June: Arbitrary Arrests



In this time there have been **2373** protests across the country; **628** of these were suppressed by riot police. Numerous injuries were also reported during this time; injuries caused by birdshot pellets were the most common. A small number of individuals sustained injuries caused by the excessive deployment of tear gas by security forces. Between 1 January and 21 May BCHR recorded a total of **772** individuals sentenced\*<sup>5</sup> in **187** politically motivated cases. Of these individuals, **92** had their Bahraini citizenship revoked, rendering them stateless, whilst **59** life sentences were handed down.



<sup>5</sup> \*BCHR was able to document sentences between the period of 1 January - 23 May 2017



## 4. End of *de facto* moratorium on the death penalty

BCHR remains particularly concerned about the use of the **death penalty** in Bahrain.

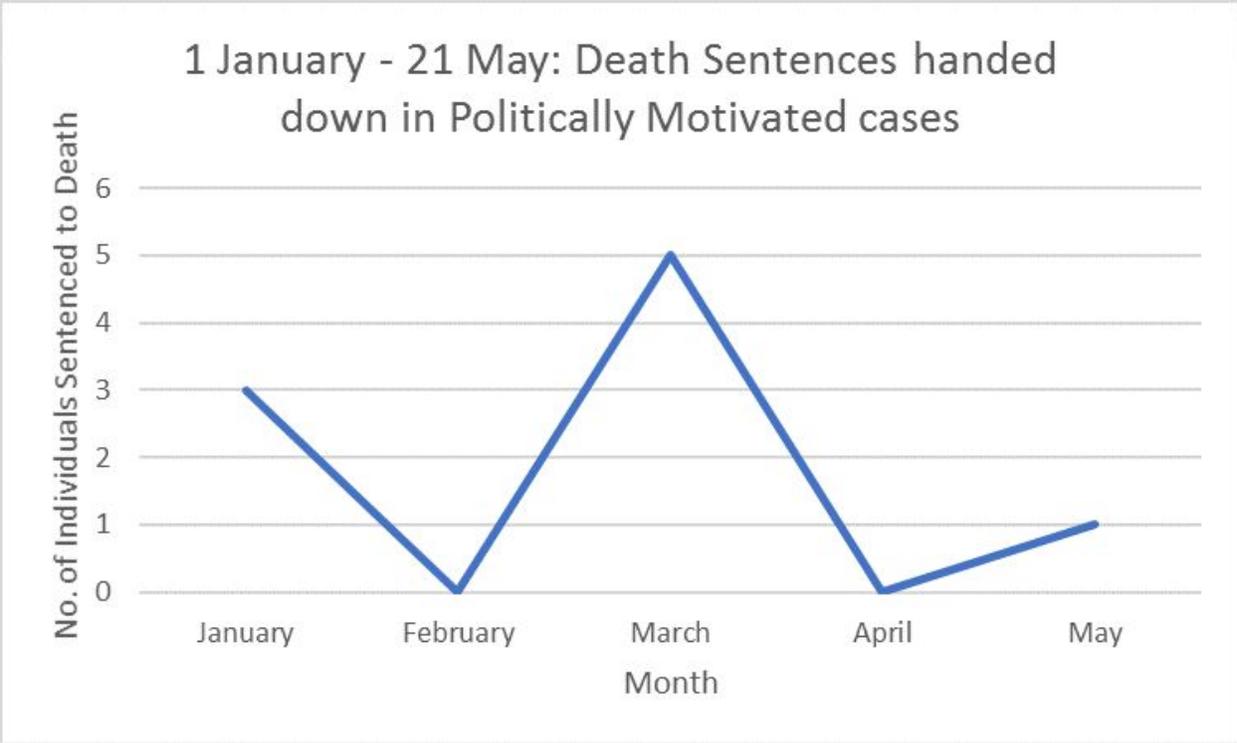
On 15 January, Bahrain ended an unofficial moratorium on the death penalty by executing three alleged torture victims, **Sami Mushaima, Abbas Al-Samea, and Ali Abdulshaheed Al-Singac**<sup>6</sup>. The three men were executed by firing squad after their death sentence was approved by the King of Bahrain. The sentences were carried out amid credible allegations of torture, and coerced confessions<sup>7</sup>. All three men were coerced into providing false confessions to a bomb attack that had killed three security officers and their trials severely violated due process regulations. A UN expert described the executions as extrajudicial killings<sup>8</sup>.

<sup>6</sup> Bahrain Center for Human Rights, 15.01.2017 Bahrain Executes Three Stateless Torture Victims Following King Hamad's Authorisation <http://bahrainrights.org/en/node/8434>

<sup>7</sup> Bahrain Center for Human Rights, 12.05.2017 UN Torture Committee "Concerned at the Climate of Impunity which Prevails in Bahrain" <http://bahrainrights.org/en/node/8748>

<sup>8</sup>The Conversation, 19.01.2017 A Triple Execution in Bahrain Has Provoked National Outrage - and International Silence

**Mohammed Ramadan** and **Husain Ali Moosa** are both at imminent risk of execution. They were sentenced to death in December 2014 for their alleged involvement in an explosion in Al-Dair on 14 February 2014 that resulted in the death of a policeman<sup>9</sup>. Their death sentence was upheld on 16 November 2015 by the Bahraini Court of Cassation, and their execution is pending King Hamad’s approval. Their death sentence comes amid allegations of torture and ill-treatment.



On 8 June, Bahraini courts sentenced a further two alleged torture victims to death<sup>10</sup>. The death sentences were handed down amid grave concerns that the judiciary failed to uphold their rights to a fair trial and follow due process. Sayed Ahmed Al-Abbar (21) and Husain Ali Mohamed (20) were allegedly coerced into signing prepared confessions which then formed the basis of the

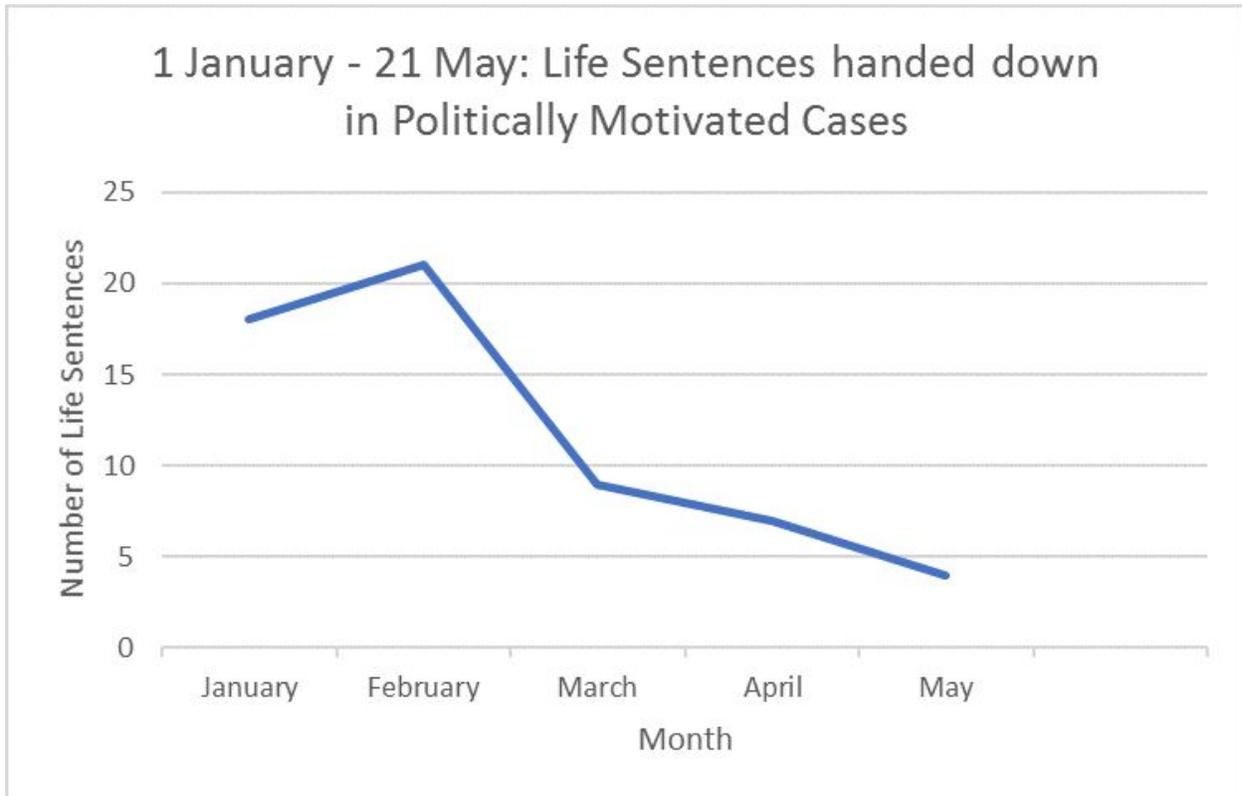
<http://theconversation.com/a-triple-execution-in-bahrain-has-provoked-national-outrage-and-international-silence-71367>

<sup>9</sup> Bahrain Center for Human Rights, Halt the Execution of Mohammed Ramadan and Hussain Ali Moosa <http://bahrainrights.org/en/halt-execution-mohammed-ramadan-and-hussain-ali-moosa>

<sup>10</sup> Bahrain Center for Human Rights, 8.06.2017 Bahraini Court Issues Two New Death Sentences Amid Torture Allegations <http://bahrainrights.org/en/node/8806>

evidence against them. Al-Abbar and Mohamed were tried alongside 11 other defendants; however, they were the only two to receive the death sentence.

Since January 2017 a total of **9** individuals have been sentenced\*<sup>11</sup> to death in Bahrain.



The resumed use of the death penalty was the subject of many of the 175 recommendations made to Bahrain by the UN Human Rights Council during Bahrain’s Universal Periodic Review (UPR) on 1 May 2017<sup>12</sup>. Many countries recommended that Bahrain move towards the abolition of the death penalty and impose an official moratorium on the death penalty. Other recommendations made during Bahrain’s UPR were related to freedom of association and the protection of human

<sup>11</sup> \*BCHR was able to document sentences between the period of 1 January - 23 May 2017

<sup>12</sup> Bahrain Center for Human Rights, 3.05.2017 Draft Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review - Bahrain  
[http://bahrainrights.org/sites/default/files/A\\_HRC\\_WG.6\\_27\\_L.1\\_Bahrain2017.pdf](http://bahrainrights.org/sites/default/files/A_HRC_WG.6_27_L.1_Bahrain2017.pdf)

rights defenders, as well as the use of military courts and the country's broad ranging anti-terrorism laws.

Ireland recommended that Bahrain take urgent steps to facilitate the work of civil society and human rights defenders, and to guarantee the protection of all persons from intimidation or reprisals for seeking to cooperate with the UN. Denmark called for the release of all arbitrarily detained persons including Danish-Bahraini citizen **Abdulahdi Al-Khawaja**<sup>13</sup>.

## 5. Trying civilians in military courts

The use of military courts in Bahrain was seen as particularly shocking and many countries, including the Netherlands called for Bahrain to rescind law 105b, which allows for civilians to be prosecuted in military courts if accused of crimes under the terrorism laws. The Czech Republic went further and recommended that Bahrain review the anti-terrorism law and its implementation to ensure that it could not be abused and utilised to abuse, harass, and detain dissenters. Only a couple of days after these recommendations were made, on 9 May, the Bahraini authorities referred a civilian to trial before military courts for the first time since 2011. The Office of the Public Prosecution referred the case of **Fadhel Sayed Abbas Hasan Radhi**, a victim of enforced disappearance to the military courts<sup>14</sup>.

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<sup>13</sup> Bahrain Center for Human Rights, 22.06.2017 Human Rights Defender Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja: 6 Years Served of Life Sentence <http://www.bahrainrights.org/en/node/8832>

<sup>14</sup> Bahrain Center for Human Rights, 15.05.2017 First Civilian to be Tried in Military courts in Bahrain since 2011 <http://www.bahrainrights.org/en/node/8752>

## 7. The siege in Duraz

BCHR has also continued to monitor events in Duraz, and is concerned about the deterioration of the security situation in recent weeks.

On 21 May, a suspended sentence was handed down to **Sheikh Isa Qasim**, after the Bahraini government charged the leading Shiite cleric with allegedly collecting funds illegally and money laundering. Following his sentencing, on 23 May the peaceful sit-in in Duraz which had started in June 2016 was attacked by security forces<sup>15</sup>. Early in the morning national security forces, including members of the Bahraini special forces, entered Duraz and opened fire on a peaceful sit in. The raid occurred just two days after United States President Donald Trump met with Bahrain's King and said relations between the US and Bahrain were set to improve<sup>16</sup>. Birdshot pellets were fired by security forces at protesters, resulting in the death of five individuals. Those killed were **Mohamed Al-Ekri, Mohamed Alsari, Ahmed Jameel Alasfoor, Mohamed Hasan Hamdan and Mohammed Zain Eldin**. One member of each of the families of those who died was called in to Budaiya police station, where their mobile phones were confiscated, and they were asked to identify the bodies. On 28 May, the men were buried in secret and denied normal funeral rites, without the consent or the participation of their families.

The violence levied at protesters in Duraz was accompanied by reprisals against prisoners in Jau prison, who were reportedly stripped of their clothes and subjected to beatings. Activists, journalists and human rights defenders were also called in for questioning<sup>17</sup> and subjected to alleged acts of torture, and forced to renounce their human rights work publicly on social media sites<sup>18</sup>. Woman human rights defender **Ebtisam AlSayegh** was interrogated for seven hours

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<sup>15</sup> Bahrain Center for Human Rights, 23.05.2017 Deadly Attacks in Duraz Following the Sentencing of Sheikh Isa Qasim <http://www.bahrainrights.org/en/node/8774>

<sup>16</sup> Reuters, 21.05.2017 Trump Says Ties with Bahrain Won't Be Strained Anymore <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-trump-saudi-bahrain-idUSKCN18H05Y>

<sup>17</sup> Bahrain Center for Human Rights, 30.05.2017 Urgent Appeal: Rights Activists and Bloggers Are Tortured and Forced to Suspend and Resign from Their Activities <http://bahrainrights.org/en/node/8788>

<sup>18</sup> Gulf Center for Human Rights, 31.05.2017 Bahrain: Relentless Persecution, Including Torture and Sentencing, of Human Rights Defenders Continues Unabated <http://www.gc4hr.org/news/view/1607>

without a lawyer being present, and after her release from Muharraq police station, she collapsed and was taken to hospital for emergency treatment as result of the physical and psychological torture she allegedly suffered.

The violence in Duraz was followed by further suppression of freedom of association and expression when Bahrain's High Civil Court ordered the dissolution of the National Democratic Action Society (Wa'ad)<sup>19</sup>, the last major opposition group. The forcible dissolution of Wa'ad on 31 May effectively curtailed political opposition in the country. Wa'ad was dissolved and stripped of its assets after the Ministry of Justice and Islamic Affairs (MOJ) accused Wa'ad of breaching the law on political association, and accused the organisation of "advocating violence, supporting terrorism and incitement to encourage crimes." There was no evidence to substantiate these claims. The closure of Wa'ad comes after the closure of political society Al-Wefaq in July 2016, and further demonstrates that Bahrain continues its crackdown on freedom of association and expression. The lack of any credible political opposition in Bahrain restricts democracy in the country, and reduces avenues for criticism in the country, and can be seen as a move towards total suppression of freedom of expression and association in the country.

The increased use of indiscriminate violence against critical voices in the country, and the targeted reprisals levied at human rights defenders and their families is demonstrative of the escalated campaign in Bahrain.

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<sup>19</sup> Bahrain Center for Human Rights, 2.06.2017 Bahrain's High Civil Court Orders the Dissolution of Last Major Opposition Group Wa'ad <http://bahrainrights.org/en/node/8799>

## 6. Recommendations

It is a key moment to press for the end of the systematic clampdown on freedom of expression in Bahrain. The international community should insist on lifting restrictions on freedom of speech and expression. It is pointless to talk about reforms and rule of law as long as exercising fundamental rights cannot be enforced and can result in your imprisonment.

BCHR calls on Bahrain's international partners to seize every opportunity to raise strong concern about the plight of civil society in Bahrain and call on the Government to take concrete steps to foster an environment in which civil society can operate freely, in accordance with international standards, and in response to recent recommendations from Bahrain's UPR, as well as from the UN Committee Against Torture<sup>20</sup>.

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<sup>20</sup> Bahrain Center for Human Rights, 12.05.2017 UN torture Committee "concerned at the climate of impunity which prevails in Bahrain" <http://www.bahrainrights.org/en/node/8748>



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