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The Destruction of Places of Worship in Bahrain

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Table of Contents

Introduction	3
Demolition of Religious Sites: A Summary	4
Human Rights and International Law: Commitments and Obligations	9
Destruction of Historical, Cultural, and Heritage Sites	10
Government Response	16
Mosque Attacks 2012 - 2013	17
Recommendations	19
Local Sources	20
Other Sources	21

Introduction:



Above left, a sign reading 'Ain Rustan mosque' and right, the same sign in the rubble of the mosque after its demolition on April 19, 2011

In Bahrain, a total of **45 religious sites**, including **historic mosques and shrines**, have been demolished totally, damaged partially, or vandalised during the government's GCC-assisted military crackdown, aimed at quelling an anti-government protest movement which emerged on February 14, 2011. The demolition of religious sites took place during a period of 'national security' announced by the Bahraini government on March 14, 2011, when troops of the Gulf Cooperation Council Peninsula Shield entered the country; the crackdown lasted until June 1, 2011.

According to reports, mosque demolitions were carried out with bulldozers and cranes by Bahrain **security forces** and **civil defence personnel**; in some instances the attacks were carried out during the night. The perpetrators of these acts of **vandalism** and **destruction** have not yet been identified, and the authorities have yet to adopt any practical or effective measures to protect religious sites.

Demolition of Religious Sites: A Summary

A comprehensive report by the *Ja'afari Awqaf Administration*, a body that falls under the jurisdiction of the Bahrain Ministry of Justice and Islamic Affairs, shows the majority of religious sites were **razed to the ground**, and that incidents of **vandalism** included **arson attacks** and the **tampering and destruction of property**. Damaged or destroyed sites include mosques, maatams (communal religious centres), shrines, and graveyards. The report is supported by legal documentation that contradicts the government's claim that all of the destroyed religious sites were built illegally.

The report noted that from March 15 to May 30, 2011, the following mosques were damaged or destroyed:

- In **Nuwaidrat** a total of **ten** religious sites, all mosques, were demolished totally. Out of these, **seven** were listed as established buildings of historic significance, and at least **five** carried official survey registration.
- In **Zayed Town** **two** religious sites were totally demolished, and both of these were mosques. The sites were listed as cabin structures and both had official survey registration and real estate documentation.
- In **Karzakkan** **one** religious site was demolished totally. This mosque site was certified as a legal cabin structure by the Municipal authorities.
- In **Muqaba** **one** religious site was totally demolished. This mosque site was listed as an established building with requested official survey registration.
- In **Hamad Town** a total of **six** religious sites were destroyed; all were mosques, five were demolished totally, and one was burned to the ground (by unknown assailants). The sites included five cabin structures and one building, four of which carried official survey registration and two having been granted building permission.
- In **Sadad** **one** religious site was demolished totally. This site was listed as a cabin structure with real estate documentation and Waqf registration.
- In **Aali** **two** religious sites were totally demolished. Both mosques were listed as established buildings, one with a permit from the Ministry of Works, and the other with official survey registration.
- In **Mahooz** **one** religious site was demolished totally. This mosque site was listed as a building of historic significance and had been granted building permission.

- In **Al Manama two** religious sites were damaged – one was totally demolished, and the other was vandalised. One of the sites, a mosque, was listed as an established building. The second, a maatam, was listed as an established building and had been granted building permission and had official documentation.
- In **Al Zinj one** religious site was totally demolished. The site was listed as a building of historic significance and had been granted building permission.
- In **Al Kuwara one** religious site – a mosque – was burnt to the ground, and another – a maatam – was vandalised. The mosque was certified in the name of the site owner, and the maatam was listed as an established building and had been granted building permission and had official documentation.
- In **Sitra three** religious sites were damaged; one mosque was demolished totally, and another mosque and a maatam were vandalised. The demolished mosque was certified in the name of the site owner. The vandalised mosque is registered as a building of historic significance with survey registration, and the maatam is also listed as an established building with building permission.
- In **Juffair one** religious site, a mosque, was damaged with its windows smashed. This site is listed as an established building and has been granted building permission and certified survey registration.
- In **Al Muharraq two** religious sites were damaged; one mosque was vandalised, and a graveyard was ransacked, and the donations box was broken into. The mosque is listed as an established building and has been granted building permission and certified survey registration.
- In **Al Nuaim three** religious sites were damaged. The entrance of a mosque was smashed, and two mataams were vandalised. The mosque is listed as a building of historic significance with certified survey registration. One maatam was listed as a building of historic significance and the second as an established building that has been granted building permission.
- In **Askar one** religious site was vandalised. The mosque is a new building with restoration permission.
- In **Al Diraz one** religious site was vandalised. The mosque is listed as an established building and has been granted building permission.
- In **Al Daih one** religious site was totally demolished. The mosque was listed as an established building and has been granted building permission and certified survey registration.
- In **Boori one** religious site was vandalised. The maatam is listed as an established building and has been granted building permission and certified survey registration.

- In **Al Sanabis one** religious site was vandalised. The maatam is listed as an established building and has been granted building permission and certified survey registration.
- In **Isa Town one** religious site was vandalised. The maatam is listed as an established building.
- In **Bani Jamra one** religious site was damaged. The walls of this graveyard were demolished, and a number of graves were destroyed. The site carries certified survey registration and real estate documentation.





Religious literature in the ruins of demolished Fadak Zahra mosque in Hamad Town

Despite government reassurances that the vandalised and destroyed mosques would be rebuilt, efforts have met with limited success. For example:

- In **Nuwaidrat** Bahraini citizens have rebuilt seven of the mosques with no involvement from the authorities. The government started to rebuild two of the mosques in June 2013. Abu Thar Mosque was transformed into a public garden and the government has no intention of rebuilding it.
- In **Zayed Town** the government has rebuilt one of the mosques whilst the beginning to rebuild the other in October 2013.
- In **Karzakkan**, the authority insists on delaying the rebuilding of the mosque and on replacing its location.
- In **Muqaba**, no action has been taken so far to rebuild the mosque.
- In **Hamad Town**, the government has rebuilt one mosque whilst others are still pending; the government commenced reconstruction at five mosques in February, May September, October and December 2013 respectfully. Bahraini citizens have renovated another partially destroyed mosque without government assistance.

- In **Sadad**, no action has been taken to rebuild the mosque. The government claimed that it had commenced works at the site in February 2014.
- In **Aali**, the government insists on changing the locations of both mosques. The government began rebuilding one of the mosques in September 2013.
- In **Mahooz**, the rebuilding of the site is still pending. The mosque was partially rebuilt in June 2014.
- In **Al Manama**, no action has been taken yet to rebuild the sites.
- In **Al Zinj**, no action has yet been taken to rebuild the site.
- In **Al Kuwara**, the rebuilding of the mosque is still pending.

Human Rights and International Law: Commitments and Obligations

Noting the Bahraini government's **responsibility to protect and preserve religious, cultural and heritage sites** in line with its purported commitment to International Law and human rights, specifically:

Article 18 of the International Declaration of Human Rights, which states that:

Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.

Reminding the authorities of their **obligations** under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, to which Bahrain is a signatory, we also draw on UN General Assembly Resolution 55/254 on the Protection of Religious Sites, adopted on May 31, 2001:

- 1. Condemns all acts or threats of violence, destruction, damage or endangerment, directed against religious sites as such, that continue to occur in the world;*
- 2. Calls upon all States to exert their utmost efforts to ensure that religious sites are fully respected and protected in conformity with international standards and in accordance with their national legislation and to adopt adequate measures aimed at preventing such acts or threats of violence, and invites relevant intergovernmental and non-governmental organisations to contribute to those efforts by developing appropriate initiatives in this field;*

And UN General Assembly resolution 55/97 on the Elimination of all forms of religious intolerance, adopted December 4, 2000:

Reaffirming the call of the World Conference on Human Rights, held at Vienna from 14 to 25 June 1993, for all Governments to take all appropriate measures in compliance with their international obligations and with due regard to their respective legal systems to counter intolerance and related violence based on religion or belief, including practices of discrimination against women and the desecration of religious sites, recognising that every individual has the right to freedom of thought, conscience, expression and religion,

- 8. Expresses its grave concern at any attack upon religious places, sites and shrines, and calls upon all States, in accordance with their national legislation and in conformity with international human rights standards, to exert their utmost efforts to ensure that such places, sites and shrines are fully respected and protected;*

Destruction of Historical, Cultural, and Heritage Sites

According to a Bahrain News Agency press release (dated May 25, 2011) Bahraini Minister of Culture and Information, Mai bint Mohammed Al Khalifa, recently attended a meeting of Arab and South American Culture Ministers during which she expressed Bahrain's desire to host a regional centre for the **protection of world heritage** under the supervision of UNESCO.

The Minister reportedly spoke on the importance of cultural cooperation, and the meeting called for the preservation of diversity of ideas and dialogue amongst the cultures and civilisations of the two regions.

Meanwhile, during the recent devastation of religious sites in Bahrain, **significant cultural and heritage sites have been demolished** as part of the government's campaign to quell anti-government protests.

Example 1: Al Barbaghy Mosque, Aali

Among the religious sites demolished is a shrine located in the Barbaghy area between Aali and Salmabad. The settlement at the site is thought to be some 400 years old, and was named after the historic and religious figure Sheikh Amir Mohammad al-Barbaghy. The site is thought to have been discovered in the late 1970s, and the mosque was built during the 1980s close to a fresh water spring located nearby.

The Ja'afari Awqaf Administration lists Al Barbaghy mosque as being registered with the following address: Building 2440, Road 4448, Block 744, Aali.

The government has announced its intention to rebuild the mosque but has proposed that it is rebuilt in a remote location and continues to ban prayers in the actual mosque location.



A sign for the Al Barbaghy mosque bearing the name of Amir Mohammed al-Barbaghy; the mosque was demolished on 17 April 2011



An external view of the Al Barbaghy mosque from the outside; the mosque was demolished on 17 April 2011



The courtyard of the Al Barbaghy mosque; the mosque was demolished on 17 April 2011



The land where the Al Barbaghy mosque stood before it was demolished on 17 April 2011

Example 2: Sheikh Abid Mosque, Sitra

The Sheikh Abid mosque and shrine was built on land formerly used as a palm grove owned by an influential private individual. The mosque is named after the historic and religious scholar Ibrahim al-Abid, who is said to have lived at the location. Ibrahim al-Abid is held in great esteem as a respected and pious figure, and is buried at the site where the mosque in his name once stood.

As it is also his gravesite, the mosque has the added religious significance of being a shrine as well. The mosque structure itself is said to have been built at the gravesite during the 1950s by members of the local community.

The mosque caretaker and locals registered the site with the Ja'afari Awqaf Administration, and the establishment was registered with the Municipal authorities at the address: Block 609, Sitra.

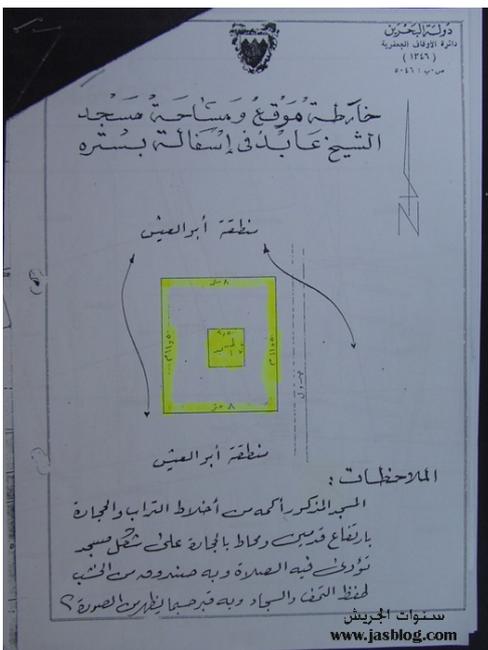
The mosque has been partially rebuilt through funds raised by Bahraini citizens but is still incomplete.



A sign for the Sheikh Abid mosque and shrine; the site was demolished on 15 April 2011



Interior of the Sheikh Abid mosque and shrine; the site was demolished on 15 April 2011



Municipal Authority documentation of the Sheikh Abid mosque and shrine; the site was demolished on 15 April 2011



The land where the Sheikh Abid mosque and shrine stood before it was demolished on 15 April 2011

“At the Sheikh Aabed Mosque in the village of Sitra, once a ramshackle building that residents said was more than a century old, prayer rugs and other religious paraphernalia covered the ground.”

(Taken from CS Monitor article, 11 May 2011)

Example 3: Mo'men Mosque, Nuwaidrat

The recently restored Mo'men mosque in Nuwaidrat was demolished on April 19, 2011, along with the religious articles within the building and several trees that surrounded it. The site is listed with the Ja'afari Awqaf Directorate as a new building with the address: Building 2304, Block 646, Nuwaidrat.

The government has begun to rebuild the mosque but has compensated a large proportion of the actual mosque land.

"When I was a child, I used to go and pray with my grandfather," said a local resident, who asked to be called only Abu Hadi. "The area used to be totally green, with tiers of sweet water wells. Why did they destroy this mosque?" Abu Hadi wailed. "Muslims have prayed there for decades."

(Taken from CS Monitor article 11 May 2011)



A view of the newly refurbished Mo'men mosque; the mosque was demolished on 19 April 2011



Rubble of the Mo'men mosque after it was demolished on 19 April 2011

Government Response

The Minister of Justice and Islamic Affairs, Khalid bin Ali bin Abdulla al Khalifa, has told media officials that “illegally built” structures were torn down in Bahrain, including 41 ‘temporary’ religious structures in Manama.

The Ministry of Justice and Islamic Affairs is allegedly willing to provide ‘legal alternatives’ for buildings with licenses for the structures which have been thus removed.

The minister also claimed that demolitions took place after dark out of ‘respect’ for the feelings of locals.

A Commission of Inquiry was established, by royal decree, on June 29, 2011 to investigate the events that took place in Bahrain since February 2011. The royal decree states that the commission’s final report, to be submitted to the King by October 30, 2011 shall contain an “examination of alleged unlawful demolition of religious structures”.

The first section of the seventh chapter in the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry, chaired by Mahmood Sharif Bassiouni, from paragraph 1306 to 1336 found that the authorities in the Kingdom of Bahrain have attacked a large number of places of worship that belong to the Shia Muslim sect (the ruling family does not belong to this sect). The attacks varied between complete destruction on the one hand and vandalism on the other, taking place from March 15 –May 30, 2011 during a period of ‘national security’. The Commission found that the demolition which took place was systematic and sanctioned by the state, with administrative orders being issued by the government and the active participation of the army and police. None of the officials, who are responsible for the demolition of at least 38 mosques, has been held accountable despite the fact that the prosecution has approved a criminal complaint on the basis that there is sufficient evidence. Although the Government of Bahrain has pledged to re-build the mosques demolished in 2011, it refuses to take responsibility for the criminal act. The US Commission on International Religious Freedom’s (USCIRF) 2012 report noted that the mosque demolition appeared to specifically target the Shia in “response to the demonstrations” inspired by the Arab Spring. Furthermore, the USCIRF found “no clear timeframe” for the rebuilding of the destroyed mosques.

Mosque Attacks 2012 - 2013

The government of Bahrain has continued to attack mosques. The Bahrain Human Rights Organisation (BHRO) claimed in a report in December 2012 that 39 attacks occurred on places of worship in 2012 alone.

Attacks continued into 2013:

- On April 22, 2013, the Ja'fari Waqf Directorate (JWD), a government body under the Ministry of Justice and Islamic Affairs that claims to be independent, despite the fact that board members are appointed directly by the government, sent a letter to the Northern Municipal Council ordering it to move the Abu Talib Mosque in Hamad Town to a remote and secluded location. Similar directions had also been sent in 2012, regarding the Fadak Al Zahra Mosque and Al Askari Mosque, also both in Hamad Town.
- The government converted Abu Thar mosque in Barboura into a "public park" on the May 8, 2013.
- The shrine of (Sheikh Maytham Al-Bahrani) which dates back to around 1299 AD was attacked on June 29, 2013. It is a shrine of a prominent scholar and is highly respected by Bahrainis and by Shia Muslims around the world. The Shrine was attacked previously.
- On July 17, 2013 the Bahraini authorities alleged that an explosion was set off in a car park next to a Sunni mosque in Riffa during prayer times. The incident was immediately condemned by political and religious leaders. However, within hours of the alleged incident, 5 Shia mosques were targeted in apparent retribution.
- Two previously demolished mosques, the Al-Imam Al-Sadiq Mosque in Salmabad and the Imam Al-Baqer mosque in Barboura Nuwaidrat were attacked by live ammunition and vandalised on July 18, 2013.
- Police forces banned prayers in Al Burbegi mosque on December 21 and 28, 2013. The ban was enforced after governmental bodies announced the relocation of Al Burbegi mosque.

Places of worship attacked in 2013:

#	Mosque	Location	No	Date	Attack
1	Abu Taleb	H - Town	4	26-4-2013	Demolition
2	Al Barbagi	Aali	3	7-5-2013	Vandalism
3	Al Askari	H - Town	2	29-4-2013	Demolition
4	Fadak Al Zahraa	H - Town	2	28-8-2013	Demolition
5	Matam Jidali	Jidali	1	6-6-2013	Tear gas during ceremony
6	Abu Thar Al Qufary	Barboora	1	7-9-2013	Demolition and converted to garden
7	Imam Sadiq Mosque	Salmabad	3	18-8-2013	Live ammunition
8	Al Hadi Mosque	H - Town	2	6-25-2013	Vandalism
9	Sh Maytham Shrine & Mosque	Zinj	2	29-6-2013	Vandalism
10	Al Asfari	Bilad	1	19-9-2013	Vandalism
11	Imam Baqer Mosque	Barboora	3	18-8-2013	Live ammunition
12	Sheikh Fadel	Maqsha	1	18-8-2013	Tear gas canister
13	Sheikh Hamaad	Bilad	1	20-7-2013	Vandalism
14	Matam Ansar Al Adala	Diraz	1	21-8-2013	Tear gas
15	Al Anwar	Daih	3	11-8-2013	Vandalism
16	Imam Redha	Maameer	1	25-8-2013	Tear gas canister – almost burnt
17	Safwan	Jid Ali	1	30-8-2013	Vandalism
18	Maatam Abu Saiba	Abu Saibaa	1	10-10-2013	Tear gas
19	Al Ababsa	Aali	1	12-11-2013	Tear gas
20	Al Barbaqi	Aali	5+	28-12-2013	Sectarian/Takfiri slogans

Recommendations

In light of the above:

- We urge the relevant authorities in Bahrain to cease any policy or practice which targets religious, cultural and heritage sites, and infringes upon the rights of its citizens to worship freely in public or in private.
- We urge the relevant authorities in Bahrain to ensure the preservation and protection of local religious, cultural and heritage sites from acts of vandalism or sabotage.
- We urge the relevant authorities in Bahrain to co-operate fully with the Commission Inquiry, in carrying out a fair, independent and transparent investigation into these acts of vandalism or sabotage of local religious, cultural and heritage sites.
- We call on all relevant bodies and international organisations to implore the Bahraini authorities to honour their commitments to human rights, including the freedom to worship in private or in public, and the protection and preservation of religious, cultural and heritage sites.
- We call on the Arab and South American Culture Ministers to pressure the Bahraini government to respect, protect and preserve local culture and heritage sites in light of its bid to host a UNESCO regional centre.

Local Sources

Al Imam Sadeq mosque, described as 'old', listed as: Building 128, Salmabad Road, Block 706.
www.youtube.com/watch?v=QHLfwXjqHiw

Al Rasool Al A'adham mosque, listed as 'new', located in Karzakkan. According to the sign of the mosque as seen in this video, the mosque was built on 16 February 2007.
www.youtube.com/watch?v=HD4i230FfTM

Sheikh Ibrahim mosque (also described as Al Alaiwat / Al Alaiwain), listed as 'new' in Zinj area: Building 370, Sheikh Salman Road, Block 356.
www.bahrainonline.org/showthread.php?t=267348

Ain Rastan mosque listed in Aali on Sheikh Zayed Road, Block 742.
www.shaheed-bh.net/showthread.php?t=91827

Al Wattiya mosque (also named **Qadam al-Mahdi**) listed in Mahooz on Kuwait Road, Block 334. This mosque was demolished 10 years ago, was re-built, and had been fully functional since 28 October 2009.
www.fajrbh.com/vb/showthread.php?t=18362

Umm al-Baneen mosque listed as a cabin site in Hamad Town.
<http://bahrain2day.com/forums/index.php?/topic/595762-ea-aaia-aoii-ca-caeaeiae-yi-iccn-13-aiiaee-iai/>

Al Imam Mohammad Jawad mosque at the 9th Roundabout in Hamad Town.
www.fajrbh.com/vb/showthread.php?t=18386

Fadak Zahra mosque in Hamad Town.
<http://twitpic.com/4krvly>

Al Imam Jawad mosque, listed as 'old' in the Nuwaidrat area.
www.youtube.com/watch?v=7I7BXqHEUI8

Imam Hassan Al Askari mosque listed at Roundabout 22, Hamad Town, Block 1216. The donation box was allegedly emptied and the mosque destroyed.
www.facebook.com/media/set/fbx/?set=a.216678848344881.61818.201903626489070

Kareem Ahl Al Bait mosque listed at Roundabout 4, Block 1207, Hamad Town.
www.facebook.com/media/set/fbx/?set=a.178578008858463.37590.174567579259506

Al Imam Hassan mosque in Nuwaidrat listed as 'old', at Road 4652, Block 626.
www.youtube.com/watch?v=N5qvnRxbkgw

Salman Al Farsi mosque listed as Building 554, Block 464, in the Nuwaidrat area.
www.youtube.com/watch?v=6WmDUijjumw

Al Imam Baqer mosque listed as 'new' in the Nuwaidrat area.
www.youtube.com/watch?v=ihANVklebTU

Al Wattiya mosque listed on Road 9, Block 509, in the Mugabah area.
www.bahrainonline.org/showthread.php?p=2113518

Other Sources

“While Bahrain Demolishes Mosques, US Stays Silent” McClatchy

<http://www.mcclatchydc.com/2011/05/08/113839/while-bahrain-demolishes-mosques.html>

“Bahrain's Crackdown Creates Sectarian Fallout”

<http://www.npr.org/2011/06/07/136885812/bahrains-crackdown-creates-sectarian-fallout>

“Bahrain Sunni Leaders Target Shiite Mosques”

<http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Middle-East/2011/0511/Bahrain-s-Sunni-rulers-target-Shiite-mosques>

“Shiite mosque demolitions raise tension in Bahrain”

<http://uk.reuters.com/article/2011/04/22/uk-bahrain-mosques-idUKTRE73L1B920110422>

“Bahrain Really Is Bulldozing Shiite Mosques: Documenting the Destruction with Open Sources”

<http://govinthelab.com/bahrain-really-is-bulldozing-shi%E2%80%99ite-mosques-documenting-the-destruction-with-open-sources/>

Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry

<http://www.bici.org.bh/>

The US Commission on International Religious Freedom

<http://www.uscirf.gov/>

Ja'fari Waqf Directorate (JWD)

http://www.jwd.gov.bh/view.php?page=home_en