

ON 03 MAY 2014 PRESS FREEDOM IN BAHRAIN JOURNALISTS  
ARRESTED / AND PUT ON TRIAL FOR REPORTING ON HUMAN  
RIGHTS VIOLATIONS IN BAHRAIN MORE THAN ONE DOZEN  
CASES TO DATE HAVE BEEN REPORTED. JOURNALISTS, BLOGGERS,  
AND PHOTOGRAPHERS HAVE BECOME TARGETS OF  
GOVERNMENT ATTACKS IN AN ATTEMPT TO HIDE THE RE  
PORTING ON HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS. 03 May, 2014 PRESS  
FREEDOM BLOGGERS JOURNALISTS ARRESTED AND PUT  
ON TRIAL FOR REPORTING ON HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS IN  
BAHRAIN MORE THAN ONE DOZEN REPORTEDLY TORTURED  
BEEN REPORTED. JOURNALISTS, BLOGGERS, AND PHOTOGRA  
PHERS HAVE BECOME TARGETS OF GOVERNMENT ATTACKS IN  
MEDIA UNDER ATTACK IN BAHRAIN

# #PRESSFREEDOM



**BAHRAIN CENTER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS**

*Defending and promoting human rights in Bahrain*

## ABOUT US

The Bahrain Center for Human Rights (BCHR) is a nonprofit, 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 it, the BCHR is still functioning after gaining wide internal and external support for its struggle to promote human rights in Bahrain.

The co-founder and former President of the BCHR is Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja, who is currently serving a life sentence in prison for charges related to freedom of speech. The current President is Nabeel Rajab, who is serving a two year prison sentence for his work as a human rights defender. The Acting President is Maryam Al-Khawaja.

Note on this report:

The cases outlined below represent only a small portion of the total number of violations that the Bahraini government is perpetrating against members of the media.

For more information, please visit our website:

[www.bahrainrights.org](http://www.bahrainrights.org)



“Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.”

- Universal Declaration of Human Rights  
Article 19

## INTRODUCTION

The government of Bahrain has continued to target local independent journalists and photographers with arrest and detention in order to obscure any evidence of the ongoing human rights violations. The BCHR has documented at least twelve cases of imprisoned journalists — a majority of whom are photographers — and at least seven reported cases of torture in the last year.

The BCHR expresses concern that journalists, photographers, and bloggers are not only specifically targeted with tear gas and shotgun pellets by Bahraini authorities, but that national law also criminalizes free speech.

In the absence of international media access, local independent journalists are the only lense through which the world can gain crucial insight into the current events in Bahrain.

Activists and members of the media are commonly charged with insulting the King and insulting a government entity. The government has gone as far as to persecute members of the media under the Terrorism Law, which was recently modified so it may be interpreted to include the work of journalists and human rights defenders. The BCHR has also documented several cases in which articles and photographs were banned for publication and foreign journalists were denied entry visas to Bahrain.

The BCHR strongly believes that progressive democratic discourse is only achieved if the government and the opposition have an equal opportunity to freedom of expression and opinion without fear of retribution.

## JOURNALISTS BEHIND BARS

The government of Bahrain has continued to target local independent journalists and photographers with arrest and detention in order to obscure any evidence of the ongoing human rights violations. The BCHR has documented at least twelve journalists who are currently behind bars. The sample cases outlined below are representative of the treatment that journalists can expect if they choose to report on human rights abuses or the pro-democracy movement in Bahrain.

### AHMED HUMAIDAN

- More than 163 international photography awards
- Member of the *Fédération Internationale de l'Art Photographique*
- Member of the Photographic Society of America
- Second highest ranked Arab photographer in winning photography contests, among his awards are:
  - Gold Medal in FKNS Grand Prix, 2012 – Serbia
  - Gold Medal from FIAP for Hungarian Circuit, 2012
  - Honorary Badge from for PSA Int'l Exhibition, 2012



On 26 March 2014, the Third High Court issued a 10-year prison sentence against photographer Ahmed Humaidan on charges of participating in an attack on a police station, in a trial that lacked the international standard of due process.

After his arrest for alleged arson in December 2012, he stated that he suffered a nervous breakdown as a result of the torture he was reportedly subjected to by the Criminal Investigation Department (CID). Humaidan was reportedly subjected to various methods of torture, including being forced to stand in a cold room for hours whilst handcuffed and blindfolded. Humaidan informed his family that while he was blindfolded and handcuffed at the CID, he was reportedly forced to carry an object that his interrogators told him was a live bomb. He was made to hold the object for several hours under duress and strict surveillance. Additionally, Humaidan stated that he was psychologically intimidated during questioning in order to extract a false confession. Interrogators reportedly threatened to bring charges against his siblings on fabricated crimes if he refused to confess.

Humaidan's lawyer stated that no incriminating evidence was presented in court against him, except for the confessions that were reportedly extracted under torture and reports from anonymous sources from within the CID. There were numerous inconsistencies in witness testimony throughout the trial, particularly in regards to the location of the alleged crime.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> <http://bahrainrights.org/en/node/6830>



### SAYED AHMED AL-MOSAWI

- Member of the United Photographers International
- Member of the Photographic Society of America
- Member of the Federation of International Art photography
- 127 international photography awards
- More than 50 certificates in the area of photography and photojournalism.

Photographer Sayed Ahmed Al-Mousawi, was arrested after a house raid at dawn on 10 February 2014 by a group of civilians backed by regime forces. His electronic devices were confiscated including a mobile phone, four hard disks, a laptop and other equipment. Al-Mousawi was taken to an unknown location and subjected to enforced disappearance for a period exceeding five days. Ahmed's father stated that his son told him that he was subjected to severe torture at the Criminal Investigation Department. The torture reportedly included hanging him on the door and electrocuting him, beating his genitalia, forcing him to stand for four continuous days, and stripping him off his clothes. His lawyer added that Al-Mosawi was threatened with rape, sexually harassed, and beaten on sensitive areas.<sup>2</sup> He was interrogated in absence of lawyer about his activity as a photographer and accused of joining a terrorist cell that aims to disturb the national security. He was reportedly beaten and forced to sign a statement that he was not permitted to read. On 15 April 2015, his detention was extended for an additional 45 days. He is currently being held without a trial.<sup>3</sup>

### HUSSAIN HUBAIL

- His work has been published by Agence France-Presse, Voice of America<sup>16</sup>, and other news outlets
- Awarded by Al-Wasat for a photograph of protester running through a cloud of tear gas



Hussain Hubail was arrested on 31 July 2013 at Bahrain International Airport. He was held incommunicado for approximately four days and his family and lawyer heard nothing from him. He was granted a family visit first on 7 August 2013, and he told his family that while he was at the CID he had been beaten with plastic hosing, kicked, and had been brought to hear his detained friend, blogger Mohamed Hasan, being tortured. Hubail was also reportedly subjected to psychological intimidation: Officer Bassam Mohammed Al-Muraaaj threatened that he could do anything and everything to him. He also reported that he did not receive any food and was prevented from sitting down or sleeping. Hussain suffers from a heart condition, which has worsened since his detention. He is being denied necessary medical treatment for his condition and is also not provided with medical attention or hospital care until he reaches critical condition.

Despite the fact that Hubail has reported being subjected to torture to both the public prosecutor and to the court, no investigation has been conducted. Instead he was brought to trial on 28 November 2013, for charges of "calling for illegal gatherings, inciting hatred against the regime, and inciting people to ignore the law and misuse of social media." On 29 April 2014, he was sentenced to five years in prison.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> [http://manamavoices.com/news-news\\_read-19866-0.html](http://manamavoices.com/news-news_read-19866-0.html)

<sup>3</sup> <http://bahrainrights.org/en/node/6779>

<sup>4</sup> <http://bahrainrights.org/en/node/6657>



Jasim Al-Noaimi, a blogger who has been detained since 31 July 2013, is also accused of inciting hatred against the regime through social media and calling for illegal protests in the same case as Hubail. During the court hearing, Al-Noaimi stated that he was tortured at the Criminal Investigation Department and that he was not allowed to sleep for four days. He added that he is suffering from severe pain in his back and he was not allowed to appoint himself an attorney.<sup>5</sup> On 29 April 2014, he was sentenced to five years in prison.

Ali Maaraj is a blogger on *Luluwat Awal* who posted news and articles critical of the King and the government. On 7 January, Maaraj was arrested from his home in Nuwaidrat and his computer was confiscated. His brother was simultaneously arrested from his workplace and both were taken to the Criminal Investigation Department. His brother was released six weeks later, however, Maaraj was sentenced on 8 April 2014 to two and a half years imprisonment on charges of insulting the King and improper handling of information technology.<sup>6</sup> His trial lacked basic standards of fair trials:<sup>7</sup> the judge reportedly did not look into evidence, refused to listen to the prosecution or defense witnesses, and issued the sentence after only three hearings.<sup>8</sup>



## TORTURE OF JOURNALISTS

The BCHR has continued to document cases of torture of journalists. At least seven cases of tortured journalists were reported in the past year.

### AHMED AL-FARDAN

- 106 international awards
- Member of PSA-Photographic Society of America
- Works for Demotix and NurPhoto agency
- Winner of *ifex* and *Freedom House* photo contests



Photographer Ahmed Al-Fardan was arrested on 26 December 2013 at 2:30 in the morning during a house raid by plain clothed security forces without an arrest warrant.<sup>9</sup> His computer and cameras were also reportedly confiscated. He was held incommunicado at the Criminal Investigations Directorate in Manama, and during his interrogation he was beaten until he passed out. He was taken to the Salmaniya Medical Complex where X-Rays revealed he had sustained two broken ribs. He was then transferred to the prisoner's hospital in the Ministry of Interior headquarters where he remained until 31 December. He was kept in detention on charges of intending to participate in gatherings until he was released on bail on the 9th January 2014 under international pressure from media watch groups.<sup>10</sup>

5 <http://www.bahrainrights.org/en/node/6638>

6 <http://www.alwasatnews.com/4232/news/read/874268/1.html>

7 <http://luluawal.no-ip.org/news.php?newsid=1357>

8 <http://bahrainrights.org/en/node/6826>

9 <http://bahrainrights.org/en/node/6705>

10 <http://bahrainrights.org/en/node/6719>

Although a complaint of torture was filed with the Special Investigative Unit (SIU), no one has yet been held accountable for the ill treatment that Al-Fardan was subjected to. Despite all evidence to the contrary, the Ministry of Interior released a statement that Al-Fardan was not tortured and that the Amnesty International statement is wrong in all allegations.<sup>11</sup>

This was not the first time Al-Fardan has been arrested. In August 2013, he was approached by two men who asked to speak with him. He was then reportedly beaten, punched, choked, and forced into a car where a police officer threatened him if he refused to cooperate and provide information and photos about protesters.<sup>12</sup>

## MOHAMMED HASAN

- Well-known online blogger since 2007
- Media fixer for foreign journalists
- Appeared on Dan Rather's report about Bahrain



Mohammed Hassan has been arrested several times due to his blogging activity and his work as a fixer. He was first arrested in April 2012 while accompanying journalists to a protest. He was reportedly severely beaten and denied access to legal representation. In April 2013, Hassan was arrested along with the *Sunday Telegraph's* chief foreign correspondent, Colin Freeman, for participating in an illegal protest; they were released hours later. However, in June 2013, he was summoned for interrogation over charges of blogging, writing without a license, and attending illegal gatherings. On 31 July 2013, Hassan was arrested in a house raid at dawn by masked security forces without the presentation of warrant. His phone and computer were confiscated. He was then taken to the CID and was interrogated for four days during which time he was reportedly subjected to beating with fists and a plastic hose, kicked, forced to strip naked, and psychologically intimidated with threats of electrocution and rape of his sisters. Additionally, he was not allowed to sit down, eat, or sleep. Hassan was forced to sign papers without being allowed to read them. On 7 August 2013, he was taken to the public prosecution where he was accused of illegal gatherings, inciting hatred against the regime, inciting people to ignore the law and misuse of social media and he was ordered to serve 45 days in detention pending an investigation. He was released approximately two months later on bail.<sup>13</sup> The BCHR has learned that Mohamed Hassan has left Bahrain and is seeking political asylum in the United Kingdom.

## ATTACKS ON JOURNALISTS WHILE ON DUTY

The government continues to specifically target photojournalists who cover protests and opposition gatherings. They are regularly targeted with tear gas and shotgun pellets. (See this video recorded in April 2014 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ohDmnVBxjmg>)

On 4 April 2014, four accredited reporters—Mazen Mahdi of EPA, Hamad Mohamed and Amer Mohamed of Reuters, and Hasan Jamali of the AP—were shot with police birdshots while they were covering funeral of a young man in AIEker.<sup>14</sup> While the injuries of other reporters were minor, Mahdi was admitted to hospital where eight pellets were removed from his hand and the area around his neck.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.gulf-daily-news.com/NewsDetails.aspx?storyid=368749>

<sup>12</sup> <http://bahrainrights.org/en/node/6354>

<sup>13</sup> <http://bahrainrights.org/en/node/6657>

<sup>14</sup> [http://manamavoice.com/index.php?plugin=news&act=news\\_read&id=19617](http://manamavoice.com/index.php?plugin=news&act=news_read&id=19617)

<sup>15</sup> [http://manamavoice.com/index.php?plugin=news&act=news\\_read&id=19545](http://manamavoice.com/index.php?plugin=news&act=news_read&id=19545)



On 15 March 2014, photojournalist Hasan Jamali of the AP was shot with a tear gas canister in the chest as the security forces attacked protesters and members of the media who were on site at Sanabis (see photo at right).<sup>16</sup>



In a different incident on 26 Feb 2014, Mahdi and Mohamed Al-Shaikh of FPA were shot at directly with a tear gas canister while covering a protest at Daih. Mahdi suffered injuries to his leg as a result. He said that the police were able to see the journalists carrying cameras but continued to shoot directly at them.<sup>17</sup>

## JOURNALISTS ON TRIAL

The government of Bahrain has targeted journalists and bloggers with arrest and detention due to their work and exercising their right to the freedom of speech. The most common charges used against activists and journalists have been “insulting the King” and “insulting a governmental entity.” In November 2013, the authorities implemented harsher penalties for this charge, with up to seven years imprisonment and a fine of up to BHD 10,000. The BCHR has published a report documenting the cases of those accused of insulting the King, which can be found at <http://www.bahrainrights.org/en/node/6682>.

The trial of independent journalist and author Abbas Al-Murshid began on 27 March 2014 on charges of insulting the King, although he was not previously questioned by any officials regarding the charges against him.<sup>18</sup> Al-Murshid publishes articles and studies that criticize the political condition in Bahrain on several websites including the *Bahrain Mirror*, an online news source that has been blocked in Bahrain. Al-Murshid was arrested in May 2011, and was held in detention until July 2011 when he was released under international pressure from human rights organizations. For several years prior to his arrest, Al-Murshid was a frequent target for harassment by the Bahraini Authorities: the online *Al-Manama Newspaper*, of which he was editor-in-chief, was closed by the Ministry of Information in 2002; the government banned his books from being published and sold in Bahrain; and in 2009 he sustained an eye injury from rubber bullets fired by the riot police. The next hearing of Al-Murshid’s case will be on 12 July 2014.

## BANNED PRESS CONTENT

Authorities in Bahrain have applied various restrictions on freedom of expression in all of its forms. In 2013, Freedom House categorized Bahrain as “not free” in its annual report, Freedom of the Press, and stated that Bahraini authorities had blocked more than 1,000 websites.<sup>19</sup> In August 2013, the Ministry of Communication Affairs declared that it “monitored 70 violating websites, forums and social media networks,” and promised to “take necessary measures against them.” Among the sites closed was the Bahraini Ulma Islamic Council ([www.olamaa.net](http://www.olamaa.net)).

Following wide criticism of the Ministry of Education over photos published online that showed school playgrounds filled with water after the heavy rainfalls which resulted in school closures, the Minister of Education, Abdulla Al-Mutawa, issued a circular prohibiting the publishing of photos and news without approval from the Ministry. It circular stated that, “schools are not entitled to directly publish news or photos in various media outlets, including Instagram.”<sup>20</sup>

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.alwasatnews.com/3843/news/read/746956/1.html>

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.alwasatnews.com/4191/news/read/861263/1.html>

<sup>18</sup> <http://bahrainrights.org/en/node/6767>

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/2013/bahrain#.U2lf8V4VdZg>

<sup>20</sup> <http://bahrainrights.org/en/node/6661>

Cases of banned content in the printed press have been reported. In February 2014, national newspaper, *AlBilad*, banned the publication of an article written by journalist Fatin Hamzah that criticized Bahrain's principal airliner, Gulf Air. Hamzah then published the banned article on social networks, and as a result, now faces a lawsuit from Gulf Air.<sup>21</sup>

In January 2014, it was reported that articles by Sawasn Al-Shaaer and Tareq Alamer were banned from publication at newspapers *AlWatan* and *AlBilad* for criticizing the national dialogue.<sup>22</sup> As part of the National Assembly recommendations, the Ministry of Communication Affairs established an office of coordination and follow up to initiate legal procedures against those who misuse social media networks and to toughen punishments. Misuse is vaguely and broadly stated as "incitement and promotion of violence and terrorism and harming national security and stability by disseminating wrong information to foreign parties."<sup>23</sup>

On the 8th April, Parliament approved amendments to Political Societies Law to remove the article that states, "every political society has the right to issue publications". According to the amendments, political societies can only issue periodicals after obtaining authorization from Minister of Communication Affairs.<sup>24</sup>

Journalists and bloggers can be criminalized under Bahraini law for exercising free speech. The BCHR recently published a report about the [terrorism law in Bahrain](#) in which it documented the vagueness and broadness of this law, which is commonly used to restrict journalists and bloggers. The law imposes tough punishments on the promotion of terrorist acts and the possession of documents containing materials considered to promote terrorist acts. In February, the government approved a law concerning freedom of press that states that journalists shall only receive non-custodial punishment in one of its articles; however, it also states that media could be asked to reveal their source of information if it constitutes a "direct threat to public order". The Bahraini government has employed loosely defined laws to target free speech and free press in the past; therefore, concerns about restrictions are raised when laws open to broad interpretation are enacted.<sup>25</sup>

## DENIAL OF ENTRY TO BAHRAIN / WORK RESTRICTIONS

Bahrain has continued to deny entry of journalists, except a group of selected sport journalists who have reported on the F1 race without comment on the political events. In August 2013, when a rebellion protest was planned, Hayder Abbasi, from Al Jazeera, reported denial of entry though he was visiting for tourism,<sup>26</sup> and Amira Asad reported denial of entry for being a journalist.<sup>27</sup> In December 2013, another case was reported of David Isaksson, who was conducting research on global happiness.<sup>28</sup>

On 26 Feb 2014, Hasan Jamali, reporter with the AP, was banned from covering a protest in Daih,<sup>29</sup> because security forces confiscated his license while covering another protest the previous day.<sup>30</sup>

21 [http://manamavoice.com/news-news\\_read-18670-0.html](http://manamavoice.com/news-news_read-18670-0.html)

22 [http://manamavoice.com/index.php?plugin=news&act=news\\_read&id=17672](http://manamavoice.com/index.php?plugin=news&act=news_read&id=17672)

23 <http://www.alwasatnews.com/3981/news/read/797395/1.html>

24 <http://bmirror14feb2011.no-ip.org/news/14928.html>

25 <http://gulffnews.com/news/gulf/bahrain/government-approves-media-law-draft-1.1288869>

26 <https://twitter.com/HyderAbbasi/status/365273825476227072>

27 <https://twitter.com/amiraasad/status/366976216198152193>

28 <http://www.globalreporting.net/en/news/david-isaksson-denied-entry-bahrain>

29 <https://twitter.com/BahrainPA/status/438742136071393280>

30 <https://twitter.com/Mohdsultan81/status/433622302564315136>

On 11 January 2014, the security forces banned Mohamed Al-Mukharaq, photojournalist from the Alwasat newspaper, from photographing of the site of the demolished mosque AlBarbaghi. The journalist was specifically warned against taking any photos of the security forces present at the site, who frequently use force to disperse the groups who gather to pray there.<sup>31</sup>

## IMPUNITY

The BCHR has documented attacks on photographers and journalists since the beginning of the pro-democracy movement in 2011. Blogger Zakariya Al-Ashairi was documented in the BICI report as having been tortured to death.<sup>32</sup> Others have faced extrajudicial killings, including photographer Ahmed Ismail Hasan.<sup>33</sup> During the three-month state of emergency in 2011, several photographers and members of the media were documented to have been summarily dismissed from their jobs and arrested during house raids; their families were reportedly intimidated, and some of their personal photography equipment was reportedly stolen. The government has failed to independently investigate these incidents, and has failed to hold the perpetrators of these acts accountable.

On the contrary, in a recent case, the police officer Sara Al-Moussa was acquitted of all charges in which she reportedly tortured the journalist Nazeeha Saeed.

Nazeeha Saeed, pictured right, is a correspondent for France 24 and Radio Monte Carlo Doualiya. She was reportedly subjected to torture at the Riffa police station at the hands of security personnel in May 2011. Describing her torture, Saeed stated that she was blindfolded, kicked, punched, and slapped. She also stated that her hair was pulled, she was whipped with plastic tubing, had a shoe forced into her mouth, her head dunked into a toilet, and an unknown, caustic liquid said to be urine was poured onto her face. She was also subjected to psychological intimidation and was repeatedly insulted, mentally abused, and asked to make a false confession. (For more information please see: <http://bahrainrights.org/en/node/5598>).



Nazeeha Saeed obtained three independent medical reports that confirmed that she was indeed subjected to torture, two of which were issued by doctors working for the Ministry of the Interior. Despite all of the evidence to support her claim, and the fact that she was able to identify five of her alleged torturers, only officer Sarah Al-Moosa was charged by the Public Prosecution Office. On 23 June 2013, a Court of Appeal in Manama upheld the acquittal of policewoman Sarah Al-Moosa on charges of torturing and mistreating Nazeeha Saeed. The Public Prosecution Office has elected not to take the case to the Cassation Court.

31 <http://www.alwasatnews.com/4145/news/read/846582/1.html>

32 <http://bchr.hopto.org/ar/node/5737>

33 <http://bchr.hopto.org/ar/node/5143>

ON 30 MAY 2011 PRESS FREEDOM IN BAHRAIN JOURNALISTS  
ARRESTED AND PUT ON TRIAL FOR REPORTING ON HUMAN  
RIGHTS VIOLATIONS IN BAHRAIN MORE THAN ONE DOZEN  
CASES TO DATE HAVE BEEN REPORTED. JOURNALISTS, BLOG-  
GERS, AND PHOTOGRAPHERS HAVE BECOME TARGET OF  
GOVERNMENT ATTACKS IN AN ATTEMPT TO SILENCE THEIR  
REPORTING ON HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS. 30 May, 2011 PRESS  
FREEDOM BLOGGERS JOURNALISTS ARRESTED AND PUT  
ON TRIAL FOR REPORTING ON HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS IN  
BAHRAIN MORE THAN ONE DOZEN REPORTEDLY TORTURED  
BEEN REPORTED. JOURNALISTS, BLOGGERS, AND PHOTOGRA-  
PHERS HAVE BECOME TARGET OF GOVERNMENT ATTACKS IN  
MEDIA UNDER ATTACK IN BAHRAIN



**BAHRAIN CENTER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS**

*Defending and promoting human rights in Bahrain*