

BAHRAIN :
time to address systematic torture
OPEN LETTER to the CAT
Bahrain Center for Human Rights (BCHR)
Bahrain Institute for Rights and Democracy (BIRD)
Gulf Center for Human Rights (GCHR)
International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH)
Organisation Mondiale contre la Torture (OMCT)
Reprieve

ATTENTION: Members of the Committee against Torture

April 5, 2017

Our organisations write to urge you to reiterate Bahrain's obligations under the Convention Against Torture («the Convention») and give immediate attention to:

- the systematic use of torture against political detainees ;
- the use of torture to obtain false confessions ;
- reliance upon evidence obtained through torture to achieve convictions, including death sentences ;
- the refusal to investigate allegations of torture in detention facilities;
- the deteriorating conditions of detention for activists and Human Rights Defenders;
- the government's continued refusal to ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture («OPCAT») and allow the UN Special Rapporteur on torture to visit the country.

Next week, Bahraini authorities will appear before your Committee in Geneva, as part of the Committee's regular review of the Bahraini government's record under the Convention. Over the years, Bahrain's government has failed to implement most of the CAT's recommendations, especially those related to its systematic failure to hold torturers accountable, particularly members of the security forces. By specifically pushing the Bahraini delegation to acknowledge the systematic use of torture, you would be making a valuable contribution toward genuine accountability for torture victims in Bahrain.

As documented by our organisations, torture is a constant presence in Bahrain's judicial system, used systematically to coerce confessions during pre-trial interrogations and threaten and punish detainees whilst they are imprisoned in detention facilities. The Bahraini government has launched an intensified crackdown on civil society in the past year, and in January it broke a seven-year executions moratorium by executing three torture victims, all of whom were convicted based on confessions they claimed were extracted through torture.

Moreover, the Bahraini human rights institutions purportedly tasked with carrying out independent and Istanbul Protocol-compliant investigations of torture complaints have instead done the opposite, acting to cover up torture allegations and refusing to investigate them. This continues to exacerbate the near-total impunity afforded to members of Bahraini security forces accused of torture. Compounding this culture of impunity is the refusal of Bahrain's European allies, some of whom have invested millions in the training of these human rights institutions, to acknowledge that such technical assistance and international support should be made conditional upon demonstrable improvements in torture accountability—such as ratifying OPCAT and allowing a visit by the Special Rapporteur on torture.

These developments demonstrate how important it is for the Committee to urge Bahrain to acknowledge and address the country's abysmal record on torture. Specifically, we ask that you urge the Bahraini government to:

- Take immediate action to halt the inhumane treatment and harassment of detained human rights defenders and activists like Abdulhadi Al -Khawaja¹ and Nabeel Rajab²;
- Provide information about the treatment of Mr Al-Khawaja and Mr Rajab;
- Immediately stay all death sentences in cases where the accused alleges he was tortured into providing a false confession, pending full investigation by an independent body;
- Establish new, demonstrably independent accountability mechanisms empowered to conduct investigations into allegations of torture and other ill-treatment of detainees and prisoners, with the recognition that future international support will be linked to Bahrain's ratification of OPCAT and agreement to a visit from the UN Special Rapporteur on torture

¹ see Urgent: Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja in need of urgent access to medical care to prevent lasting vision loss ; <http://www.bahrainrights.org/en/node/8615>

² Bahrain: Further Information: Growing Health Concerns for Prominent Activist: Nabeel Rajab <http://www.bahrain-rights.org/en/node/8636>