



**Australian Government**  
**Refugee Review Tribunal**

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# Country Advice

## Bahrain

Bahrain – BHR38069 – Bahrain Centre for  
Human Rights – Publications –  
Demonstrations – Membership  
3 February 2011

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### 1. When was the Bahrain Human Rights Centre established?

The Bahrain Center for Human Rights (BCHR) was registered with the Bahraini Ministry of Labor and Social Services in July 2002.<sup>1</sup>

The BCHR was subsequently de-registered by Majid al-Alawi, the Minister of Labor and Social Services, in September 2004. The Ministry issued a statement in which it claims that the dissolution occurred as a result of the BCHR's activities which contravened the Associations Law of 1989. In a *Middle East Online* report, the Minister's office is quoted as saying that the Minister issued "many warnings" to the centre which were "ignored".<sup>2</sup>

Reports from 2005<sup>3</sup> through to mid-2010<sup>4</sup> all indicate that the Bahrain Centre for Human Rights (BCHR) remains de-registered. The BCHR appealed against the Ministry's dissolution of its registration, but the Minister's decision was upheld by the Cassation Court<sup>5</sup> (The Supreme Court of Appeal which was established in 1989, and serves as the final court of appeal for all civil, commercial, and criminal matters).<sup>6</sup>

In spite of this setback, the BCHR remains pro-active in public demonstrations against government corruption, ineptitude and policy, the lack of political freedom and freedom of expression. The BCHR continues to provide grass root assistance to members in the community to affect change in their lives and is vocal in both domestic and international forums about social

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<sup>1</sup> 'About BCHR' (undated) Bahrain Center for Human Rights website <http://www.bahrainrights.org/en/about#> – Accessed 1 February 2011 Attachment 1

<sup>2</sup> 'Bahrain dissolves Human rights centre', 2004, *Middle East Online*, 29 September. <http://www.middle-east-online.com/english/?id=11412> – Accessed 3 October 2005 Attachment 2

<sup>3</sup> 'Bahrain: Rights Center Closed as Crackdown Expands', 2004, Human Rights Watch website, 30 September. (<http://hrw.org/english/docs/2004/09/30/bahrai9422.htm> – Accessed 3 October 2005) Attachment 3

<sup>4</sup> Amnesty International 2010, *Bahrain: National human rights institution bolstered by appointment of prominent activists* 30 April <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/MDE11/002/2010/en/67984e26-8c76-4152-9dac-626c4a6356da/mde110022010en.html#> – Accessed 27 January 2011 Attachment 4

<sup>5</sup> US Department of State 2007, 'Country Reports on Human Rights Practices – 2006', March 6, [www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2006/78850.htm](http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2006/78850.htm) – Accessed 08 Mar 2007 Attachment 5

<sup>6</sup> The Arab Center for the Development of the Rule of Law and Integrity (ACRLI) website, *Country Profile: Bahrain* <http://www.acrli.org/countryprofiles/bahrain.html#> – Accessed 27 January 2011 Attachment 6

issues.<sup>7</sup> These acts of dissent result have resulted in arrests and detentions of participants as well as acts of corporal punishment inflicted upon them.<sup>8</sup>

## 2. What are its most recent publications?

On October 2008 the BCHR submitted a report to The United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) dealing with issues of Women Migrant Domestic Workers in Bahrain.<sup>9</sup> The report was revisited and updated with additional data on December 2010.<sup>10</sup>

The BCHR also produced a major report in November 2009 regarding the government's smear campaign against the human rights organisations operating within Bahrain. The report states that funding is being provided by the government through the secret service to create fictitious human rights groups to counter the influence wielded by the established organisations involved in human rights issues in Bahrain. The members of these government sponsored groups are designated as representative of Bahraini's NGO's but are actually instruments of the Bahraini government.<sup>11</sup>

Although the government has deregistered the BCHR as an organisation, it remains active in providing reports and data to organisations such as the United Nations, Human Rights Watch and the Islamic Human Rights Commission.<sup>12</sup> It regularly produces statements and documents to highlight human right issues and posts these on its website. The issues the BCHR strongly advocates for are the protection of women and their rights, the unemployed, the rights of migrant workers, the freedom of expression and association and the cessation of government influenced discrimination.<sup>13</sup>

The BCHR also organised a press conference for 11 October 2010 in the House of Lords in the United Kingdom to unveil its claims and evidence of human rights abuses committed by the

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<sup>7</sup> 'Frequently Asked Questions' (undated) Bahrain Center for Human Rights website <http://www.bahrainrights.org/en/faq#> – Accessed 1 February 2011 Attachment 38

<sup>8</sup> 'Joint Statement by BCHR, BHRS and BYSH: Alarming deterioration in human rights situation, detaining two prominent activists,' 2009 *Bahrain Center for Human Rights*, 28 January <http://www.bahrainrights.org/en/node/2711> – Accessed 28 January 2011 (CISNET Bahrain) Attachment 8; Amnesty International Report Bahrain 2008, Amnesty International, 28 May, 2008, <http://thereport.amnesty.org/eng/regions/middle-east-and-north-africa/bahrain> – Accessed 28 January 2011 Attachment 9

<sup>9</sup> 'BCHR Report to CEDAW Committee-The Situation of Women Migrant Domestic Workers in Bahrain' 2008, *Bahrain Center for Human Rights* October <http://www.bahrainrights.org/en/node/2490#> – Accessed 31 January 2011 Attachment 10

<sup>10</sup> 'Waiting For Reform & Recognition: Female Migrant Domestic Workers in Bahrain' 2010 *Bahrain Center for Human Rights* 24 December <http://www.bahrainrights.org/en/node/3692#> – Accessed 31 January 2011 Attachment 11

<sup>11</sup> 'A Report Presenting the Documents that Reveal the "GONGOS" Organizations in Bahrain, Their Role, Work Mechanisms and Termination Fake Human Rights Organizations To Mislead Public Opinion and Trapping the Human Rights Organizations and Defenders' 2009, *The Bahrain Center for Human Rights* November <http://www.bahrainrights.org/files/GONGO.pdf> – Accessed 31 January 2011 Attachment 12

<sup>12</sup> 'Discrimination in Bahrain: The Unwritten Law' 2003, *Islamic Human Rights Commission* 1 September <http://www.ihr.org.uk/show.php?id=2856#> - Accessed 3 February 2011 Attachment 39 ; 'BCHR Report to CEDAW Committee-The Situation of Women Migrant Domestic Workers in Bahrain' 2008, *Bahrain Center for Human Rights* October <http://www.bahrainrights.org/en/node/2490#> – Accessed 31 January 2011 Attachment 10; Human Rights Watch 2010, *Bahrain. Torture Redux* 8 February Part II Background, <http://www.hrw.org/en/node/88200/section/5#> – Accessed 1 February 2011 Attachment 23

<sup>13</sup> 'Bahrain: Dangerous Statistics and Facts about the National Security Apparatus: Its role in the escalation of violence' 2009, *Bahrain Center for Human Rights* 5 March <http://www.bahrainrights.org/en/node/2784#> – Accessed 31 January 2011 Attachment 13

Bahrain government.<sup>14</sup> This press conference proceeded<sup>15</sup> in spite of the consequences of an earlier press conference in the United Kingdom during August 2010 which was also critical of the Bahrain government and human right abuses that have occurred there. Mr Abduljalil al-Singace, a leading figure in the Shiite opposition association Haq Amdash was one of the speakers of the August conference. According to the *Washington Times*, Mr Amdash was detained at the airport by security personnel when he arrived back in Bahrain. It was later claimed he was beaten and electric shock was used during his incarceration and as a result required assistance in walking and lost his hearing.<sup>16</sup>

### **3. Does it organise demonstrations? If so, what are the details of recent demonstrations?**

The BCHR states on its website that it conducts “public seminars, community-level discussion forums, and **street demonstrations**”.<sup>17</sup> The most recent reports that describe the BCHR as being directly involved in demonstrations occur in 2007. This was during a period of time when there was an outbreak of violence associated with a reaction to issues of discrimination. The Muslim Shiite majority felt disempowered by the ruling Sunni Muslim minority that dominates in government and other important positions in society. In these instances the hierarchy of the BCHR took a more direct role in the demonstrations.<sup>18</sup> Additionally, demonstrations have been organised by committees that are associated with the BCHR. These demonstrations occurred in April and September 2005,<sup>19</sup> May 2006 and in December 2007.<sup>20</sup>

### **4. How does a person become a member of the Centre?**

Initially there were 26 founding members of BCHR. They included prominent lawyers, doctors, journalists and NGO leaders. Membership to the general assembly is open to volunteers who serve more than six months at one of the BCHR committees. The general membership in turn elects the board of directors every two years.<sup>21</sup>

The BCHR website provides the following description of its committees:

The BCHR have initiated and facilitated a number of independent issue-based committees in which affected people choose their own course of action and speak with their own voice. The committees initiated by the BCHR include: the “Unemployed

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<sup>14</sup> ‘Invitation to Press Conference: Bahrain: Authenticated reports of torture by independent investigators’ *Bahrain Center for Human Rights* website <http://www.bahrainrights.org/en/node/3460#> – Accessed 31 January 2011 Attachment 14

<sup>15</sup> ‘Bahrain: Authenticated reports of torture by independent investigators’ 2010 *Bahrain Center for Human Rights* 11 October <http://www.bahrainrights.org/en/node/3493#> – Accessed 31 January 2011 Attachment 15

<sup>16</sup> Birnbaum, B. ‘Bahrain continues crackdown on Shi’ite opposition’ 2010. *Washington Times* 15 September <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2010/sep/14/bahrain-shiites-fear-arrests-detention-torture/?page=2> – Accessed 31 January 2011 Attachment 16

<sup>17</sup> ‘Frequently Asked Questions’ (undated) Bahrain Center for Human Rights website <http://www.bahrainrights.org/en/faq#> – Accessed 1 February 2011 Attachment 38

<sup>18</sup> ‘Bahrain arrests trigger clashes’ 2007 *Kuwait Times* <http://www.bchr.net/en/node/1024> – Accessed 31 January 2011 Attachment 19

<sup>19</sup> ‘The Unemployment Committee: Background Information’ (undated) Bahrain Center for Human Rights website <http://www.bahrainrights.org/ref11020604> – Accessed 2 February 2011 Attachment 21

<sup>20</sup> ‘Bahrain: Arrest of eleven human rights defenders’ 2008 *Front Line – The International Foundation for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders* 4 January <http://www.frontlinedefenders.org/node/1315#> – Accessed 2 February 2011 Attachment 20; ‘Urgent Action Needed: Five Activists Appealing Hopelessly on 14th September’ 2008 *Bahrain Center for Human Rights* 10 September <http://www.bahrainrights.org/en/node/2430> - Accessed 3 February 2011 Attachment 26

<sup>21</sup> ‘About BCHR’ (undated) Bahrain Center for Human Rights website <http://www.bahrainrights.org/en/about#> – Accessed 1 February 2011 Attachment 1

and Underpaid People Committee” (established in September 2005), “Landless People Committee”, and “Victims of Torture Committee”<sup>22</sup>

## 5. Is there a record of members?

The BCHR states on its website that:

The government has issued numerous threats warning that further legal action will be taken against the members should they continue their activities. According to the ‘Societies Law’ (widely criticized by human rights organizations), members of civil societies unrecognized by the Ministry of Social Affairs can be sentenced for up to 6 months in prison and/or fined up to BD500.

For this reason we have chosen not to publicize the names of all our members at this point of time. We hope you understand our concerns in this regard.<sup>23</sup>

## 6. What are the names of the senior committee members and staff of this organisation?

The BCHR states that it does not place the names of its officers and the members of the board in the public domain. It states the reason for this is that:

...it may threaten their personal wellbeing.

On September 24, 2004, BCHR president Abdulhadi Alkhawaja gave a lecture at a public symposium about poverty in Bahrain, in which he criticized the Prime Minister of Bahrain. In the following days Abdulhadi was arrested by the police, and the BCHR ordered to close down by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs<sup>24</sup>

## 7. Have any of its members or supporters been arrested or detained in recent years?

Available reports indicate that the top echelons of the BCHR are regularly harassed and imprisoned by Bahraini authorities. Those identified in reports as being arrested on a single occasion or multiple times are:

- Mr Muhammad Saeed Al Sahlawi – BCHR Administrative Board member was arrested in September 2010;<sup>25</sup>
- Mr. Abbass Abdul Aziz Al-Omran, BCHR Administrative Board member arrested 16 December 2008;<sup>26</sup>
- Mr Nabeel Rajab – described variously as director and President of the BCHR;<sup>27</sup> he is an active Human Rights campaigner and travels overseas to attend conferences. He has been regularly arrested by security forces over the years; and
- Mr Abdulhadi Al Khawaja – from 2004 until 2009, he is described as being the president of the BCHR. Since March 2009 his role is now Protection Coordinator for the Middle

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<sup>22</sup> ‘Frequently Asked Questions’ (undated) Bahrain Center for Human Rights website

<http://www.bahrainrights.org/en/faq#> – Accessed 1 February 2011 Attachment 38

<sup>23</sup> ‘BCHR Board of Directors’ Bahrain Center for Human Rights website <http://www.bahrainrights.org/board#> – Accessed 27 January 2011 Attachment 30

<sup>24</sup> ‘BCHR Board of Directors’ Bahrain Center for Human Rights website <http://www.bahrainrights.org/board#> – Accessed 27 January 2011 Attachment 30

<sup>25</sup> ‘Lawyers boycott trial, protesting torture of activists’ 2010, *International Freedom of Expression Exchange* 15 December [http://www.ifex.org/bahrain/2010/12/15/trial\\_torture/#](http://www.ifex.org/bahrain/2010/12/15/trial_torture/#) – Accessed 1 February 2011 Attachment 31

<sup>26</sup> ‘Bahrain Judicial harassment and slander campaign orchestrated against several human rights defenders’, World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT), 24 February, 2009, <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/49acf9183.html> – Accessed 1 February 2011 (CISNET Bahrain) Attachment 32

<sup>27</sup> ‘Lawyers boycott trial, protesting torture of activists’ 2010, *International Freedom of Expression Exchange* 15 December [http://www.ifex.org/bahrain/2010/12/15/trial\\_torture/#](http://www.ifex.org/bahrain/2010/12/15/trial_torture/#) – Accessed 1 February 2011 Attachment 31

East at Front Line (excluding Bahrain).<sup>28</sup> Frontline was founded in Dublin in 2001 with the specific aim of protecting human rights defenders at risk.<sup>29</sup> He is currently on trial for insulting an airport official after he was removed from an aircraft bound for Turkey to attend a human rights conference there.<sup>30</sup> There are numerous reports that indicate he has been arrested on multiple separate occasions since 2004.<sup>31</sup>

In December 2008 the authorities conducted a wide ranging sweep of members of various activists including the Unemployed Committee (a committee set up with BCHR assistance)<sup>32</sup> and made arrests in the name of uncovering a “terror plot”. Afterwards confessions by those arrested were produced and then televised. The confessions implicated various leading members of human rights groups in Bahrain, including the President of the BCHR. More arrests followed the confessions and criminal charges were laid. The indictments were for:

“joining a group that was established against the provisions of the law, and whose aim is to undermine the provisions of the Constitution and laws and to prevent the public authorities from fulfilling their work, and to abuse personal liberties and the public rights of citizens, including through terrorism”<sup>33</sup>

In this instance the King pardoned those arrested before the trials were finalised.<sup>34</sup> Regardless of the threat of imprisonment and persecution, those BCHR office holders with a public profile<sup>35</sup> continue to be vocal critics of the Bahrain government by providing a commentary and remaining an active participant in local, regional and international events.<sup>36</sup> The BCHR continues to provide reports at these events on those individuals arrested by security forces and the physical effects on those detained.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> ‘Bahrain: Human Rights Defender Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja released on bail’ 2009 *Bahrain Center for Human Rights* <http://www.bahrainrights.org/en/node/2662#> – Accessed 1 February 2011 Attachment 33

<sup>29</sup> ‘About Front Line’ (undated) Front Line website <http://www.frontlinedefenders.org/about/frontline#> - Accessed 3 February 2011 Attachment 40

<sup>30</sup> ‘Bahrain – Trial of human rights defender Mr Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja continues’ 2010, *Frontline – Protection of Human Rights Defenders* 8 December <http://www.frontlinedefenders.org/node/13993#> – Accessed 1 February 2011 Attachment 34

<sup>31</sup> ‘Rights Group in Pledge’, 2005, *Daily News – The Voice of Bahrain* website, 27 September. <http://www.middle-east-online.com/english/?id=11412> – Accessed 3 October 2005 Attachment 7

<sup>32</sup> ‘The Unemployment Committee: Background Information’ (undated) Bahrain Center for Human Rights website <http://www.bahrainrights.org/ref11020604> – Accessed 2 February 2011 Attachment 21

<sup>33</sup> ‘Bahrain Judicial harassment and slander campaign orchestrated against several human rights defenders’, World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT), 24 February, 2009, <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/49acf9183.html> – Accessed 1 February 2011 (CISNET Bahrain) Attachment 22

<sup>34</sup> Human Rights Watch 2010, *Bahrain. Torture Redux* 8 February Part II Background, <http://www.hrw.org/en/node/88200/section/5#> – Accessed 1 February 2011 Attachment 23

<sup>35</sup> ‘The Arab Program for Human Rights Activists: Urgent – Bahrain without Rights’ 2010 *Bahrain Center for Human Rights* 29 September <http://www.bahrainrights.org/en/node/3419#> – Accessed 1 February 2011 Attachment 29

<sup>36</sup> Fakhri, A. 2005, ‘Probe plea by activists’, *Daily News – The Voice of Bahrain* website, 19 September. (<http://www.gulf-daily-news.com/story.asp?Article=122325&Sn=BNEW&IssueID=28183> – Accessed 3 October 2005 Attachment 24; ‘After King Speech Praising Security Crackdown: Bahraini Authorities Arrest Prominent Activist and Victim of Torture’ 2010 *Bahrain Center for Human Rights* 15 December <http://www.bahrainrights.org/en/node/3688#> – Accessed 31 January 2011 Attachment 25

<sup>37</sup> Nuseibeh, G. 2010, ‘Protests in Bahrain as Shiites continue demonstrations against regime’, *Risk Watch* Political Capital Policy Research & Consulting Institute [http://www.riskandforecast.com/post/energy/protests-in-bahrain-as-shiites-continue-demonstrations-against-regime\\_578.html#](http://www.riskandforecast.com/post/energy/protests-in-bahrain-as-shiites-continue-demonstrations-against-regime_578.html#) Accessed 31 January 2011 Attachment 26; ‘Authorities prevent an annual demonstration in commemoration of martyrs and torture victims’ 2009 *Bahrain Center for Human Rights* 28 December <http://bahraincenter.blogspot.com/2010/02/authorities-prevent-annual.html#> – Accessed 31 January 2011 Attachment 27; ‘Elections go off amid unprecedented crackdown’ 2010 *International Freedom of Expression Exchange* 27 October [http://www.ifex.org/bahrain/2010/10/27/election\\_crackdown/#](http://www.ifex.org/bahrain/2010/10/27/election_crackdown/#) – Accessed 1 February 2011 Attachment 28



## 8. Deleted.

### Attachments

1. 'About BCHR' (undated) Bahrain Center for Human Rights website <http://www.bahrainrights.org/en/about#> – Accessed 1 February 2011.
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16. Birnbaum, B. 'Bahrain continues crackdown on Shi'ite opposition' 2010. *Washington Times* 15 September <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2010/sep/14/bahrain-shiites-fear-arrests-detention-torture/?page=2> – Accessed 31 January 2011.
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18. Human Rights Watch 2008 *Bahrain: End Threats to Rights Activists* 13 November <http://www.hrw.org/en/content/bahrain-end-threats-rights-activists#> – Accessed 1 February 2011.
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