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BLOODIED BUT UNBOWED

UNWARRANTED STATE VIOLENCE
AGAINST BAHRAINI PROTESTERS

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Mass peaceful protests demanding political reform have shaken the Gulf state of Bahrain since mid-February. In response, the security forces initially sought to suppress the protests with brutality, killing seven protesters, injuring hundreds of others and assaulting paramedics. Proper, transparent investigations that ensure accountability and justice for the victims, and a strong government commitment to respect human rights are needed now.

On 14 February 2011, thousands of people gathered from across Bahrain. They planned to walk to the centre of the capital Manama for a peaceful “Day of Rage” demonstration in support of their demands for greater freedom and social justice. Yet peaceful protest soon turned to panic as the security forces resorted to unwarranted violence. Within a week, seven protesters were dead, hundreds of others were injured and Bahrain had reached a tipping point.

Since then, like many people elsewhere in the region, hundreds of thousands of Bahrainis have continued to demand political reforms, including a new constitution, an elected government, a greater share of the country’s wealth and the release of all political prisoners.

Following the killings and reports of other serious abuses, Amnesty International delegates, including a medical doctor specialized in emergency care and public health, visited Bahrain between 20-26 February. They interviewed witnesses to the violent events of mid-February, victims and their relatives, and hospital and mortuary staff. They also met government officials and human rights activists. They found disturbing, even damning evidence of excessive use of force by riot police and soldiers against peaceful protesters and medics.

BACKGROUND

Inspired by the popular protests in Egypt and Tunisia, the “Day of Rage” was organized on Facebook and Twitter by human rights activists and two Bahraini opposition groups. The protests were planned to coincide with the 10th anniversary of the national referendum that endorsed Bahrain’s National Action Charter – political reforms proposed by the King, Shaikh Hamad bin ‘Issa Al Khalifa, to end widespread popular unrest in the 1990s.

The reforms paved the way for elections to the National Assembly and for the country to become a constitutional monarchy. However, the opposition boycotted the 2002 elections to protest against the power of the Shura Council, the upper chamber whose members are directly appointed by the King, to veto legislation. The reform drive subsequently stagnated and the government continued to be dominated by the ruling Al Khalifa family.

In recent years, the authorities have attempted to stifle opposition by closing critical websites and banning publications, even by authorized political associations, and by arresting government critics and opponents. Yet, opposition has continued to grow, particularly among the majority Shi’a population, many of whom say they are economically and politically marginalized by the ruling family and the country’s Sunni minority.

In August-September 2010, the authorities detained 23 opposition political activists and



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charged them with supporting and funding “terrorism”. All denied the charges and most told their trial court that they had been tortured (see Amnesty International’s report, *Crackdown in Bahrain: Human rights at the crossroads* – Index: MDE 11/001/2011).

The violent crackdown in mid-February 2011 shocked but did not deter demonstrators, who strengthened their resolve. Protests continued and the political climate in Bahrain began to shift. In late February, the King replaced four ministers in a cabinet reshuffle. The Crown Prince, who had ordered the army and riot police to withdraw from central Manama on 18 February, promised to initiate a national dialogue with opposition groups, and discussions began in early March. On 23 February, the 23 detained opposition activists were released mid-trial. Hasan Mushaima’, Secretary-General of the opposition Al-Haq organization, who had been charged in his absence with the 23 activists, was “pardoned” by the King and returned to Bahrain from the UK.

On 3 March, Bahrain’s Minister of Social Development, visiting London, told Amnesty



Women protesters marching to Pearl Roundabout, 22 February 2011.

“The protesters are being attacked! Women and children are running around screaming and there is nowhere to run. Riot police are everywhere and are attacking from every corner. Many are wounded. There is a panic and chaos at the roundabout. Everyone is running and screaming.”

Witness to events on 17 February at Pearl Roundabout, central Manama

International that 408 prisoners and detainees had been released and that only seven or eight were still held. She said the Deputy Prime Minister was leading an investigation into the killings and would report directly to the King, and that two members of the security forces had already been arrested.

At the time of writing in early March, the security forces had tempered their use of force. However, the situation remained tense, with protesters still camped out in central Manama and demonstrations occasionally being staged elsewhere, including large pro-government protests by Sunni Bahrainis. On 3 March, Sunni and Shi'a youth clashed in Hamad Town, south of Manama.

“At 1am last night they started opening the gates and the 23 left one by one. We were so happy seeing him!”

The sister of one of the 23 political opposition activists detained since August-September 2010, speaking to Amnesty International on 23 February 2011

THE PROTESTS

The “Day of Rage” began with several demonstrations in predominantly Shi'a villages. Demonstrators later converged on Pearl Roundabout in central Manama. Riot police responded almost immediately using excessive force, killing two protesters within 48 hours. In protest, a camp comprising dozens of tents and thousands of protesters was established at Pearl Roundabout, and the largest Shi'a political association, al-Wefaq, suspended its participation in parliament, later withdrawing from it completely.

The worst violence happened during a raid on those camped at the roundabout in the early hours of 17 February. In a clearly planned and coordinated action, massed ranks of riot police stormed the area to evict the peaceful and mostly sleeping protesters, firing live ammunition and using tear gas, batons, rubber bullets and shotguns to disperse the crowd. Tanks and armoured vehicles then blocked access to the roundabout.

Five people were fatally wounded and at least 250 were injured, some critically.

Among the injured were people clearly identified as medical workers who were targeted by police while trying to help injured protesters in or near the roundabout.

Those evicted from the roundabout then gathered near al-Salmaniya medical centre and were soon joined by thousands of other protesters.

In the afternoon of 18 February, some protesters tried to march towards Pearl Roundabout but were confronted by riot police. According to reports, the police pulled back behind military personnel, who then fired at protesters without warning. Several were seriously injured and taken to al-Salmaniya medical unit.

On 19 February, after the Crown Prince had ordered the security forces' withdrawal from the roundabout, the protest camp was re-established.

Right: The body of 'Ali 'Abdulhadi Mushaima' being carried in a funeral procession from the hospital to the cemetery for burial, al-Daih village, 15 February 2011. According to witnesses, as people gathered at the gates of the hospital to join the procession, riot police fired tear gas and shotguns at them to disperse the crowd.



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Sayed al-Wadaei, a 24-year-old underemployed university graduate, told Amnesty International what happened to him early on 17 February at Pearl Roundabout:

"I was sleeping in the roundabout. Without warning the [police] attacked. A friend woke me. I saw children and women crying. So I went to stand by them, to try to protect them. Then 10 to 12 policemen arrived and kicked me and hit me with sticks. I was on the ground, trying to protect my head, screaming, but they wouldn't stop. Then I acted dead but they continued kicking me all over my body. Then they stopped..."

"I have a lot of pain everywhere, in the left arm, left hip, all over both legs, right shin, and have two head cuts which required eight and 12 stitches. I spent eight hours in hospital. The doctor put 'flu' on the medical records so as not to cause problems..."



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Khadija Ahmed (left), an 18-year-old medical student who was volunteering at the medical tent in the roundabout, described to Amnesty International what happened early on 17 February:

"After 3am we heard shots. Some injured arrived at the tent straight away with tear gas problems. Then police threw or fired two tear gas canisters inside the tent and pulled the flap down. People were crying 'Save me, save me from them'..."

Her twin sister Zeinab (right), a business student who was volunteering in the media centre at the roundabout, said:

"Then they attacked the tents and the medical tent... People were shouting 'Salmiya, Salmiya, We are peaceful don't attack'... One of the police was shouting at me and another was hitting my dad, really hard with a stick, who was trying to protect me, I don't know if the sticks are wood or plastic or metal but are so strong – with one single hit they smash a car windscreen..."

KILLINGS OF PROTESTERS

Riot police and soldiers fatally wounded seven people between 14-18 February by reacting to legitimate and peaceful protest with deadly force without warning. The pattern of fatal and serious injuries shows that the security forces used live ammunition, including at close range; fired medium-to-large calibre bullets from high-powered rifles; and apparently targeted people's heads, chests and abdomens.

'Ali 'Abdulhadi Mushaima', aged 21, suffered multiple gunshot wounds while at a demonstration on 14 February in al-Daih village, east of Manama. He died soon after in hospital.

The next day, around 10,000 people joined his funeral procession, which was then attacked without warning by riot police using tear gas and shotguns. Video footage provides clear evidence of police brutality and use of excessive force. A human rights activist told Amnesty International that day:



Hassan 'Abdullah Ibrahim, a 75-year-old farmer from Belad al-Qadim, told Amnesty International that he was walking in a peaceful march on 18 February in central Manama when he was shot in the leg, shattering his knee cap.

“Peaceful protesters were chanting ‘Khalifa leave’ and within minutes of the procession beginning, we were attacked by the riot police; bullets were showering the peaceful protesters and there was tear gas everywhere. Several wounded are being rushed to the hospital and many are screaming.”

One of those shot was 32-year-old **Fadhel 'Ali Matrook**. He died soon after in hospital. The death certificate describes multiple shotgun wounds to the chest and back. More than 20 other people required hospital treatment, according to a local human rights group.

Five more people died after riot police stormed Pearl Roundabout in the early hours of 17 February. One of many witnesses told Amnesty International that riot police were shooting from different angles, including from a bridge over the roundabout, while protesters desperately ran for cover.

'Isa 'Abdulhassan, aged 60, died instantaneously from a massive head wound caused by a shot fired at close range, probably from within two metres. **Mahmood Maki 'Ali**, aged 23, and **'Ali Mansoor Ahmed Khudair**, aged 52, were shot dead from within seven metres. **'Ali Ahmed 'Abdullah 'Ali al-Mo'men**, aged 23, died in hospital that evening of multiple gunshot wounds. **'Abdul Redha Mohammed Hassan**, aged 20, died four days later in hospital; he had been shot in the head from close range.

“The riot police are still attacking everyone – we fear that they will attack us at any moment.”

A Bahraini human rights activist speaking to Amnesty International on 17 February



Mohamed Ibrahim, a 30-year-old security guard from Abu Gowa, was shot by the army without warning while on a peaceful march towards Pearl Roundabout on 18 February.



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Dr Sadeq al-Ekri in hospital recovering from injuries sustained when police assaulted him at Pearl Roundabout even though he was wearing clothes that clearly identified him as a medical worker.



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Jamil 'Abdullah Ebrahim, an ambulance worker who was injured by police on 17 February, photographed five days later.

“I thought I was going to die”

Jamil 'Abdullah Ebrahim, a paramedic beaten by police on 17 February

MEDICAL PERSONNEL ATTACKED AND OBSTRUCTED

During the morning of 17 February, health workers trying to treat injured people at Pearl Roundabout were harassed, attacked and, in some cases, seriously injured. More than 10 health professionals, including most ambulance workers interviewed, told Amnesty International that they had been attacked by riot police. These attacks were unprovoked and unjustifiable.

Among those injured was **Dr Sadeq al-Ekri**, a surgeon, who had helped set up a mobile clinic in the roundabout. He told Amnesty International that police stopped him as he approached the clinic, tied his hands behind his back, forced him onto a bus, pulled his trousers down and then punched and beat him with sticks all over his body, including his genitals. Officers later threatened him, including with sexual abuse, while the beatings continued.

When Dr Sadeq al-Ekri told his attackers that he was a doctor, they shone a torch at his white shirt and saw the Red Crescent sign. They then took him and two others to an ambulance. Dr Sadeq al-Ekri had suffered a broken nose, an injured left eye, suspected fractured ribs and bruises on his chest and abdomen. He told Amnesty International:

“These physical injuries will disappear but the psychological damage will not... I didn't believe that this would happen in Bahrain.”

MISUSE OF ARMS AND AMMUNITION

International standards prohibit excessive use of force – force that is unnecessary, excessive or disproportionate to the legitimate objective to be achieved or to the threat posed. The UN Code of Conduct for Law Enforcement Officials and the UN Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials state that “the use of force by law enforcement officials should be exceptional” and that the intentional lethal use of firearms is only permissible “when strictly unavoidable in order to protect life”.

In Bahrain in February 2011, riot police used tear gas, shotguns and rubber bullets in their efforts to suppress peaceful protests, and the army used firearms to shoot at peaceful protesters using live ammunition.

Amnesty International has identified some of the ammunition collected by people in the lethal aftermath of the raid by riot police on Pearl Roundabout early on 17 February. They include US-made tear gas canisters, US-made 37mm rubber multi-baton rounds, French-made tear gas grenades, and French-made rubber “dispersion” grenades, which fragment into 18 pieces and produce a loud sound effect.

Amnesty International has also identified at least 10 countries whose governments have allowed the supply or have licensed exports of weaponry, munitions and related equipment to Bahrain. They included Belgium, France, Germany, Spain, Switzerland, the UK and the USA. Following the Bahraini security forces' use of unwarranted force against protesters, the UK government revoked some licences for arms exports to Bahrain, and the French authorities have suspended the export of security equipment to Bahrain.

Amnesty International is calling on people to urge their government, where applicable, to:

- immediately suspend the supply of weaponry, munitions (including ammunition), and related equipment used by the riot police and security forces in Bahrain; and
- conduct an urgent, comprehensive review of all arms supplies and training support to Bahrain's military, security and police forces, and to ensure no arms transfers are authorized where there is a substantial risk that they will be used for serious violations of human rights.



For the first three or so hours of the early morning raid on the roundabout, ambulances managed with some difficulty to pick up around 200 casualties and take them to hospital. At least one ambulance worker was beaten during this period. Driver and assistant paramedic **'Isa Salman** told Amnesty International:

“At around six o'clock we – myself and two Filipino paramedics – were stopped at the traffic light by riot police. They immediately pulled me out, without saying a word, and more than 20 of them were attacking me from all sides – beating and kicking.”

For about four hours after around 6.30am, ambulances were prevented from going to the roundabout area – apparently because the Interior Ministry had wrongly informed the Health Ministry that the area had been cleared and there were no more injured people there – and several more ambulance personnel were assaulted.

At around 8.30am, for example, a convoy of five ambulances was stopped by riot police. The paramedics were all in uniform. One of

them, **Jamil 'Abdullah Ebrahim**, said that police pulled him out and started beating him.

“About a dozen were there, beating me with sticks, black wooden sticks about 60cm long. Some took off their helmets to hit me with them.”

The attack lasted around five minutes. When Jamil 'Abdullah Ebrahim was returned to the ambulance he found his colleague, 'Isa Salman, with blood pouring down his face after a second beating of the morning. Officers had struck him on his head twice with a rifle butt and one had threatened him: “If you come back I will kill you”.

Ja'fer Hasan, an ambulance driver and assistant paramedic, told Amnesty International:

“We reached the lines of the police who surrounded us, smashed the windows with rifle butts and pulled me out of the ambulance and beat me all over with sticks, on my arms and shoulder, and kicking me. It lasted about five minutes.”

Jassem Mohamed Hassan, an ambulance worker who was injured by police during protests in Manama, photographed a few days later on 23 February 2011.

“Get into the ambulances and don't come back. If you do, we will kill you.”

Warnings issued to ambulance workers by officers on 17 February, according to paramedics Jassem Mohamed Hassan and Yasser Mahdi, who were both beaten and injured by police



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Above: Brothers 'Ali and Ahmed carrying a poster saying "Where are human rights?" during a demonstration in February 2011.

Cover: Demonstration at Pearl Roundabout, Manama, 21 February 2011.

ACTION NEEDED

Please write immediately in Arabic or English, urging the Bahraini authorities to:

- Ensure that excessive force is not again used against peaceful protesters.
- Respect and protect the rights to freedom of association, assembly and expression, including by guaranteeing the right to peaceful protest and refraining from arresting people exercising their rights.
- Ensure that all human rights organizations and defenders can carry out their work without political interference or hindrance.
- Set up an independent commission to investigate the killings and attacks on protesters and the assaults on medical workers; make the results public; and prosecute all those responsible for commissioning and carrying out the attacks and for abusing human rights.
- Guarantee appropriate reparation to victims of human rights violations.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS TO:

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Rifa'a Palace, Manama
Bahrain

Fax: +973 17664587
Salutation: Your Majesty

The Prime Minister
Prince Khalifa bin Salman Al Khalifa
Office of the Prime Minister
P.O. Box 1000, Manama
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Fax: +973 17533033
Salutation: Your Highness

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Our vision is for every person to enjoy all the rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international human rights standards.

We are independent of any government, political ideology, economic interest or religion and are funded mainly by our membership and public donations.

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