

Reporters Without Borders

<http://www.rsf.org/bahrain-media-freedom-still-under-attack-11-03-2015,47675.html>

Middle East/North Africa - Bahrain

Harassment

Media freedom still under attack in Bahrain

11 March 2015

The Bahraini authorities have been targeting photographers, cameramen and other news and information providers since 2011, and they continue to use trumped-up charges of illegal assembly and attacks on the state to prevent journalists and bloggers from operating.

Cameraman **Mohammed Al Najjar** was arrested by riot police while covering a protest in the west Manama district of Daih on 23 February. They released him a few hours later after beating and insulting him, and after taking his jacket and glasses.

A cameraman working for the Al-Wefaq opposition association was released on 22 February after being arrested while filming a protest in Bilad Al-Qadeem and spending a week in prison.

Two *Reuters* journalists, photographer **Hamad Mohammed** and cameraman **Aamer Mohammed**, were hit on 5 January. Although wearing a clearly-marked press vest, Mohammed was again directly hit by a teargas canister on 30 January, as was *Agence France-Presse* photographer Mohammed Al Shaikh.

Police deliberately targeted reporters covering a series of protests in Bilad Al-Qadeem. Although wearing a clearly-marked press vest, *EPA* photographer **Mazen Mahdi** was hit several times hit by teargas canisters and shotgun pellets during clashes between police and protesters on 1, 2 and 4 January.

Awaiting trial

Mustapha Rabea and **Ahmed Zain Aldeen**, two photographers who were arrested in September together with a third photographer, **Houssam Sroor**, appeared in court on 26 February on charges of attacking policemen and participating in an illegal gathering. Further hearings have been set for 23 and 24 March.

Detained photographer and cameraman **Hussam Suroor** has hearings set for 23 and 24 March as he continues to be prosecuted on several counts of attacking police, bombing, and participating in an illegal gathering. Arrested on 4 September he was already given a 10-year jail sentence on 30 September 2014 for allegedly attacking an official, participating in demonstrations and possessing flammable products. Aged only 17, he is serving this sentence in Jaw prison.

Ahmed Al Mousawi, a well-known photographer who has been detained since 10 February 2014, is being prosecuted on a charge of supplying protesters with SIM cards. His next hearing is scheduled for 29 March.

There have been several of hearings in photographer **Ammar Abdul Rasool's** appeal against the two-year jail sentence he received on 28 October and the next is scheduled for 1 April. The winner of 81 international awards, he was arrested on 25 July 2014 after plainclothes security men raided his house in the village of Eke and confiscated two cameras and a mobile phone. He is accused of participating in an illegal gathering while at a religious ritual same night.

Ahmed Al Fardan, a photographer who has received international awards, has been given a three-month jail sentence on a charge of protesting illegally. Originally arrested in December 2013 and released after two weeks, he is now out on bail of 100 dinars pending the outcome of his appeal, which is due to be heard on 13 December 2015.

Fardan, who has worked for the Nurphoto, Demotex and Sipa photo agencies, was arrested at his home in Abu Saiba (west of Manama) at around 3 a.m. on 26 December. According to the information obtained by Reporters Without Borders, he was beaten at the time of his arrest.

Reporters Without Borders condemns this systematic persecution of journalists and human right defenders and the renewed deterioration in the climate for freedom of information in Bahrain.

"We call on the judicial authorities to release Ammar Abdul Rasool and all other news and information providers who have been arrested arbitrarily, Reporters Without Borders deputy programme director Virginie Dangles said. We also urge the Bahraini authorities to stop putting direct and indirect pressure on anyone daring to transmit information at variance with what is authorized."

Cracking down on tweets

The authorities also continue to crack down on online content critical of the regime.

Nabeel Rajab, who heads the Bahrain Centre for Human Rights, is facing the possibility of being returned to prison on 15 March, when a court is due to rule on his appeal against a six-month jail sentence for allegedly insulting the security forces in tweets.

Previously acquitted of posting defamatory tweets in 2012, he was released in May 2014 after two years in detention on charges of participating in an illegal gathering, and inciting others to do so.

Online activist **Yaqoub Slais** was fined 200 dinars on 20 February in connection with a tweet on 31 August 2014 (when he was held for a day) in which he criticized forcing soldiers to vote for certain candidates in the parliamentary elections.

The interior ministry arrested nine Bahrainis on 27 January on charges of misusing social media and mocking the death of Saudi Arabia's King Abdullah. Their next hearing has been set for 16 March.

Blogger **Nader Abdul Emam** was released on 15 January when an appeal court reduced his original six-month sentence to four months – less than the time he had already been held since his arrest on a charge of insulting a religious leader on Twitter.

Arbitrary arrest and torture

Sayed Baqer Al Kamel, a photographer who has received 44 international awards, was arrested while leaving the country via the King Fahd causeway to Saudi Arabia on 9 December, and was held for two days. He was previously detained for two days in March 2014.

Photographer **Mohammed Al Oraibi**, was summoned to CID headquarters on 29 October and was told he would face arrest and torture again if he did not become an informant. He filed a complaint against the CID officers who tortured him after his arrest in February 2014 but the complaint has not yet been heard.

"Reporters Without Borders urges the Bahraini authorities to hold a serious investigation into the May 2011 torture of journalist Nazeera Saeed. A special unit in the interior ministry has reopened the case, questioning Saeed again in October and getting her to identify her interrogators in November", Reporters Without Borders deputy programme director Virginie Dangles said

Writer, blogger and women's rights activist **Ghada Jamsheer** continues to be embroiled in hearings in 10 different cases following her release on 15 December after spending three months in jail on a defamation charge for tweeting about alleged corruption at King Hamad University Hospital.

Jamsheer was arrested after being summoned to CID headquarters for questioning on 9 September. According to the Gulf Centre for Human Rights, she is banned from appearing on Bahraini radio or TV and her website has been blocked since 2009.

Cameraman **Qassim Zain Aldeen** lost his appeal on 25 February and is serving a three-year sentence right now in Jaw prison, where he is accused of vandalism in Dry Dock prison after his arrest in August 2013.

Hussain Hubail, a press photographer who was given a five-year jail sentence in April 2014, is supposed to be receiving medical treatment in a hospital but officials at Jaw prison refuse to transfer him to the hospital when he has appointments or when otherwise necessary.

He has missed two appointments and must see a doctor urgently because the medication he was

given for high blood pressure has run out.

Censorship and revoking citizenship

Al Arab News Channel's broadcasts from Bahrain were suspended just hours after its launch on 2 February after it interviewed an opposition figure in its first news bulletin. The Information Affairs Authority said on 9 February that it had "failed to obtain the required licensing approval to commence broadcasting in Bahrain."

Three reporters – **Reem Khalifa** of the *Associated Press*, **Fareshta Saeed** of *Reuters* and **Nazeeha Saeed** – were banned from attending the head of the Al-Wefaq opposition group's appearances in court on 28 January and 25 February. **Isa Ibrahim**, a photographer working for the *Al-Wasat* newspaper, was also asked not to take any pictures and to leave the area.

The government revoked the Bahraini nationality of journalist **Abbas Busafwan**, writer **Ali Al Dairi**, blogger **Ali AbdulEmam** and 72 other Bahrainis on 31 January without charging or trying any of them. Although the right to one's nationality is internationally accepted, the Bahraini authorities have been using its withdrawal to punish outspoken critics and deter dissent.

Reporters Without Borders calls the authorities to rescind this decision and stop harassing journalists and bloggers for criticizing the government and the royal family.

Bahrain is ranked 163rd out of 180 countries in the 2015 [Reporters Without Borders press freedom index](#).

(Photo: AFP)

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