

**Refugee Review Tribunal
AUSTRALIA**

RRT RESEARCH RESPONSE

Research Response Number: BHR23733
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This response was prepared by the Country Research Section of the Refugee Review Tribunal (RRT) after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the RRT within time constraints. This response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum.

Questions

- 1. The Bahrain Centre for Human Rights was closed in September 2004. What were the circumstances for the closure?**
- 2. Is it still banned?**
- 3. Are there any other similar groups?**

RESPONSE

- 1. The Bahrain Centre for Human Rights was closed in September 2004. What were the circumstances for the closure?**

In 2004 *Middle East Online* reported:

The Bahraini government has dissolved the Bahrain Centre for Human Rights, an NGO whose vice president was detained last week, according to a statement obtained Wednesday by AFP.

Minister of Labour and Social Affairs Majid al-Alawi ordered "the dissolution of the Centre for Human Rights whose activities contravene the Associations Law of 1989", the statement said.

The minister issued "many warnings" to the centre which were "ignored", it added.

Abdul Hadi al-Khawaja, a leading Bahraini human rights activist, was arrested late Saturday and detained for 45 days accused of "inciting hatred against the regime", the public prosecutor's office said.

Khawaja is also accused of "propagation of information and allegations of a nature disturbing public order", prosecutor general Sheikh Abdel Rahman bin Jaber al-Khalifa said.

In a statement issued after Khawaja's arrest, the centre protested that he was detained "for simply practicing one of his basic rights, namely freedom of speech".

The centre, along with the Bahrain Human Rights Association, was one of the non-governmental organisations authorised in the tiny Gulf state since King Hamad gradually introduced a measure of political reforms after assuming power in 1999 ('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 1).

Also in 2004 The Human Rights Watch website reported:

The order prohibits the center from resuming any activities, confiscates its funds, and requires it to surrender its documents to the authorities ('Head of the Bahrain Centre for Human Rights in Detention', 2004, International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) website, 27 September http://www.fidh.org/article.php3?id_article=1944 –Accessed 3 October 2005 - Attachment 2).

In November 2004 BBC News world edition website reported that the King of Bahrain had pardoned Mr Khawaja ('Bahrain activist pardoned by king', 2004, BBC News website, 21 November http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/4029919.stm - Accessed 3 October 2005 - Attachment 4).

2. Is it still banned?

Reports in September 2005 from the Daily News, The Voice of Bahrain website and a report from Khaleej Times online website all indicate that the Bahrain Centre for Human Rights (BCHR) remains dissolved. The BCHR, however, appears to remain vocal in the press and active in local, regional and international events and spearheading the establishment of other rights groups operating under its umbrella.

(Fakhri, Abdulrahman, 2005, 'Political Societies Face New Criticism', Daily News – The Voice of Bahrain website, 6 September <http://www.gulf-daily-news.com/story.asp?Article=121258&Sn=BNEW&IssueID=28170> – Accessed 3 October 2005 - Attachment 5; Fakhri, Abdulrahman, 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 6; 'Rights Group in Pledge', 2005, Daily News – The Voice of Bahrain website, 27 September, <http://www.gulf-daily-news.com/story.asp?Article=122978&Sn=BNEW&IssueID=28191> – Accessed 3 October 2005 - Attachment 7; 'Bahraini government inquires US about its Guantanamo detainees', 2005, Khaleej Times online website, 28 September 2005, http://www.khaleejtimes.com/DisplayArticle.asp?xfile=data/middleeast/2005/September/middleeast_September797.xml§ion=middleeast&col= - Accessed 3 October 2005 - Attachment 8.)

3. Are there any other similar groups?

Several similar groups have been identified, including, for example, the Migrant Workers Protection Society, the National Committee of People Deprived of Citizenship, Youth Human Rights Society, the Anti-Torture Committee and the Unemployment Committee all of which come under the BCHR umbrella ('Rights Group in Pledge', 2005, Daily News – The Voice of

Bahrain website, 27 September (<http://www.gulf-daily-news.com/story.asp?Article=122978&Sn=BNEW&IssueID=28191> – Accessed 3 October 2005 - Attachment 7).

Other groups having a presence in Bahrain include the Justice Centre for Human Rights, still waiting approval as at 12 September 2005 (Al A’Ali, Mohammed, 2005, ‘Another Rights Group on Way’, Daily News – The Voice of Bahrain website, 13 September, <http://www.gulf-daily-news.com/story.asp?Article=121771&Sn=BNEW&IssueID=28177> – Accessed 3 October 2005 - Attachment 9), Bahrain Human Rights Society and Awal Women Society (Al Alawi, Dalal, 2005, ‘Women call for UN rights Charter’, Daily News – The Voice of Bahrain website, 18 September 2005, <http://www.gulf-daily-news.com/Story.asp?Article=122269&Sn=BNEW&IssueID=28182> – Accessed 3 October 2005 - Attachment 10), Bahrain Women’s Union, Al Hekma Society for the Retired and Bahrain Human Rights Watch Society (Fakhri, Abdulrahman, 2005, ‘Ministry slams societies’ move’, Daily News – The Voice of Bahrain website, 18 September, <http://www.gulf-daily-news.com/story.asp?Article=122261&Sn=BNEW&IssueID=28182> – Accessed 3 October 2005 - Attachment 11; Hameed, Kanwal, 2005, ‘Family law 'vital in Arab world', Daily News – The Voice of Bahrain website, 28 September, <http://www.gulf-daily-news.com/Story.asp?Article=123060&Sn=BNEW&IssueID=28192> – Accessed 3 October 2005 - Attachment 12).

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CNN website <http://www.cnn.com/>

Network Human Rights Defenders <http://www.fidh.org/>

Bahrain Brief website <http://www.bahrainbrief.com.bh/>

Human Rights Watch website <http://hrw.org/english/docs/2004/09/30/bahrai9422.htm>

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Amnesty International USA website <http://www.amnestyusa.org/>

Sydney Morning Herald <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2004/08/09/1091903454023.html>

Databases:		
Public	<i>FACTIVA</i>	Reuters Business Briefing
	<i>REFINFO</i>	IRBDC Research Responses (Canada)
RRT	<i>ISYS</i>	RRT Country Research database, including U.S. Department of State <i>Country Reports on Human Rights Practices</i> .
RRT Library	<i>FIRST</i>	RRT Library Catalogue

List of Attachments

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