



## **Bahrain – Researched and compiled by the Refugee Documentation Centre of Ireland on 21 January 2013**

### **Any recent information on the treatment of Shias in Bahrain. Can Shias avail of state protection?**

The Introduction to an Amnesty International report states:

“On 14 February 2011 thousands of people took to the streets of Bahrain to voice their demands. The majority of protesters, Shi’a Muslims, have complained of being politically marginalized by the ruling Sunni Al Khalifa family, which dominates all aspects of political and economic life in Bahrain. The security forces responded to the largely peaceful protests with unnecessary and excessive force. Between February and March 2011 at least 35 people died, including five in custody, as did five security officers. In mid-March 2011 the government declared a three-month state of emergency (State of National Safety) during which more than 4,000 people were dismissed from their work, hundreds were arrested and scores were tortured and otherwise ill-treated in detention. Between April and October 2011, dozens of people were tried before military courts and sentenced to imprisonment. These courts were abolished in October 2011.” (Amnesty International (21 November 2012) *Bahrain: Reform shelved, repression unleashed*, p.3)

A report from The Guardian states:

“Bahrain banned all protest gatherings on Tuesday and threatened legal action against groups said to be backing escalating demonstrations and clashes. The interior ministry order is the most sweeping attempt to quash the anti-government uprising in the Sunni-ruled kingdom since martial law was imposed during the early months of unrest last year. It sharply increases pressure on political groups from Bahrain's Shia majority, which has led the protests in support of a greater political voice.” (The Guardian (30 October 2012) *Bahrain bans all protests in crackdown on Shia opposition movement*)

A BBC News report, in a paragraph headed “Call for non-violence”, states:

“Long queues formed as people left their cars and attempted to reach Diraz Mosque to listen to Sheikh Qassem, the Gulf kingdom's most senior Shia cleric, deliver his sermon. One witness said Budaiya Highway, a major road, was 'packed with police manning double and triple checkpoints'. Sheikh Qassem urged the government to meet the demands of the people. There were reports that teargas was used and that one man was seriously injured when struck in the head by a canister. One source told the BBC that police also fired bird-shot and claimed that several people had been wounded. The authorities have not commented on the unrest, but last month the interior ministry banned all public gatherings. At the same time as the clashes, the 16-year-old boy was hit and killed while crossing a busy road near Diraz. A

statement on the interior ministry's Twitter account said: 'The General Director of Traffic has announced the death of a Bahraini pedestrian, 16, in a traffic accident on Khalifa bin Salman road in Abuquwa.' Sources at the scene told the BBC that the boy, named as Ali Radhi, was being pursued by police as part of their effort to prevent people attending Friday prayers. Al-Wifaq, Bahrain's main Shia opposition party, called the youth 'a new martyr due to the brutality of the regime'." (BBC News (9 November 2012) *Bahrain police prevent people reaching Shia mosque*)

A Global Insight report states:

"With the government imposing a blanket ban on opposition protests in October, security forces sought to disperse yesterday's rally, which began in the village of Daih, approximately one kilometre west of the Pearl Roundabout. Witnesses told Agence France-Presse (AFP) that police fired stun grenades into the crowds, while the interior ministry claimed that the confrontation was initiated when 'a group of vandals...hurled petrol bombs'." (Global Insight (27 November 2012) *Police disperse protest rally in Bahrain*)

An article published by The Economist states:

"On December 14th, a coalition of opposition groups mounted a daytime protest march joined by tens of thousands, defying a ban on public gatherings of more than five people imposed in October. In the mostly Shia villages west of Manama, activists taunt the security forces relentlessly, some nights with slogans, others with crude petrol bombs. Despairing of Wefaq's trust in a constitutional process, activists from a growing grass-roots youth group, the February 14 Movement, mask their faces and mount makeshift stages to rouse the crowds with calls to topple the Al Khalifas. Images of detainees hang by the dozen in a mock cage erected in the central square of Diraz, a Shia coastal town. Nearby stands a billboard with gruesome photos of babies allegedly asphyxiated by tear gas. Here, unlike in Manama, the authorities have tired of blacking out graffiti. The walls declare 'Death to Hamad', Bahrain's self-proclaimed king. Repression continues, albeit less violently than when the uprising started. In a sign of relative leniency, an appeals court on December 11th reduced the sentence on a prominent human rights activist, Nabeel Rajab, from three to two years, still a remarkably harsh retribution for organising and joining 'illegal gatherings'. Security forces have ostensibly been retrained to curb their excesses, but still regularly conduct house-to-house raids in Shia villages. Authorities have rebuilt only five of the two dozen Shia shrines they destroyed during the worst days. In a disturbing new tactic, the government in November summarily stripped 31 Bahrainis of their citizenship. Half those affected already live in exile, but the fate of the others, some of whom appear to have been singled out because of Iranian ancestry, remains unclear." (The Economist (15 December 2012) *Getting back out there*)

An article published by The Telegraph states:

"Bahraini authorities have revoked the citizenships of 31 Shia activists, among them two former members of parliament, for having 'undermined state security,' according to state news. The names of the 31 activists, including brothers Jawad and Jalal Fairuz, both ex-MPs who represented the major Shiite Al-Wefaq bloc, were listed in the BNA report, which quoted an interior

ministry statement. Also named was Ali Mashaima, son of prominent activist Hassan Mashaima who is head of the radical Shiite opposition movement Haq and who is serving a life sentence for allegedly plotting against the monarchy. The government move comes after Bahrain late last month banned all protests and gatherings to ensure 'security is maintained,' after clashes between Shia-led demonstrators and security forces in the Sunni-ruled country. The Gulf state has experienced unrest since March last year when the authorities crushed protests led by the Shia Muslim majority." (The Telegraph (7 November 2012) *Bahrain revokes citizenship of Shia activists*)

See also article from The Telegraph which states:

"Seven of the 13, accused of plotting against the government after protests at the start of the Arab Spring in 2011 were crushed by the authorities, received life sentences. Among them was Abdulhadi al-Khawaja, a British-educated Danish citizen and co-founder of the Bahrain Centre for Human Rights, whose long hunger strike last year was publicised and narrated on social media by his daughters Zainab and Maryam. The others included Hassan Mushaima and Abduljalil al-Singace, leaders of the Shia-led opposition party al-Haq. Both also have British links - Mr Mushaima was arrested after returning from London to Bahrain to participate in the protests, while Mr al-Singace, who is disabled, was initially seized in 2010 after returning from talking at a seminar in the House of Lords and then rearrested after the protests were put down. The Bahraini royal family claims that al-Haq is attempting to enact a plot to overthrow their regime, with the support of Iran. Bahrain has a Shia Muslim majority, like Iran, but the royal family itself and a large minority elite is Sunni. Human rights groups though claim that the protests which occupied parts of Bahrain's capital Manama in February and March 2011 were largely peaceful, and their leaders arrested for advocating democratic reforms." (The Telegraph (7 January 2013) *Bahrain upholds jail terms for activists*)

Regarding the availability of state protection a Human Rights Watch report states:

"Bahrain's Court of Cassation ruling on January 7, 2013, upholding lengthy prison terms of 13 prominent dissidents appears to confirm the inability of Bahrain's judicial system to protect basic rights." (Human Rights Watch (7 January 2013) *Bahrain: Highest Court Upholds Grossly Unfair Convictions*)

This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research and Information Unit 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. Please read in full all documents referred to.

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