GlobalResearch
Center for Research on Globalization

Bahrain: Ex-Prisoners Denounce Britain's 'Torture Apparatus'

By Finian Cunningham
Global Research, March 10, 2011
Irish Times 10 March 2011

Region: Middle East & North Africa
Theme: Crimes against Humanity
In-depth Report: ARAB PROTEST MOVEMENT

Blindfolding, electrocution, physical and sexual assault are just a few of the maltreatments that recently released political prisoners have claimed they were subjected to during detention by the Bahraini state. And they say that the British government bears a heavy responsibility for the repressive policies of the Bahraini regime.

Over 300 political prisoners were set free by the state as a concession to appease the growing popular uprising in the Persian Gulf island state that started on February 14. Despite the releases, the anti-government protests have grown increasingly strident in their demand for the overthrow of the unelected Bahraini government headed by King Hamad al-Khalifa and his uncle and Prime Minister Prince Khalifa al-Khalifa. The latter has been in office for 40 years, since the country gained nominal independence from Britain in 1971.

Amnesty International said it is due to publish a report into what it calls "the increasing trend towards egregious abuses by the state security forces" in Bahrain towards those held in custody.
Several of the released detainees, who include academics, human rights activists, bloggers and clerics, spoke about the conditions during their incarceration. All of them claimed they were subjected to extreme torture and they showed physical symptoms of abuse. Their claims of "systematic torture" have been verified by the Bahrain Centre for Human Rights, which claims that up to 100 political prisoners remain in custody. Many of the political prisoners are held without trial at Al Qala, the headquarters of the Interior Ministry in central Manama, the capital of the Persian Gulf island state.

One of the released detainees, Abduljalil al-Singace, a professor of mechanical engineering at the University of Bahrain, said: "The British government bears a heavy responsibility for the repression in Bahrain. What we have here is an apparatus of torture that was formed and instructed by British security personnel."

Many detainees and opposition spokesmen believe that British personnel continue to be involved in the policies and practices of Bahrain's secret police, the Security and Intelligence Service. They point out that the methods of interrogation are "identical" to those used during the 1970s, 80s and 90s when the SIS was headed by Ian Henderson, a British police officer, who is believed to still reside in Bahrain and acts as a personal advisor to the king.

Henderson, now in his late eighties, is notorious among Bahraini opposition groups, who label him "torturer-in-chief". He has been the subject of torture allegations in the past by Amnesty and Human Rights Watch. British parliamentarians, including Lord Avebury, George

Galloway and Jeremy Corbyn have previously called on the British government for his prosecution over alleged personal involvement in gross maltreatment of Bahraini prisoners, some of whom died while in custody.

Professor al-Singace was among those rounded up last August prior to national elections in Bahrain. As with the other detainees he was accused of, but not formally charged with, plotting acts of terrorism. Al-Singace denies this and said the only thing he is "guilty of" is making public criticisms of the regime.

During his detention, he says he was kept in solitary confinement, beaten on the head and body, and blindfolded for long periods of time. Suffering from childhood polio, 38-year-old al-Singace uses crutches at all times. He was forced to stand continuously for several days by his captors and when he collapsed, he was beaten and forced to resume standing. At one point, his interrogators threatened that they would bring his wife, daughter and sister to the jail and rape them in front of him.

Professor al-Singace said: "We are calling on the European Court of Human Rights to hold the British government to account for the inhumane repression in Bahrain. British citizens have been involved in the most barbaric treatment of innocent civilians with the knowledge and consent of the British government."

Most the conditions claimed by al-Singace during his seventh months of incarceration were reiterated independently by the other former detainees. In addition, some spoke of how they were electrocuted on the genitals and one man said that he was raped by the guards with a glass bottle. Others said they were hung by the hands and feet "like animals" and beaten with hard rubber hoses.
Over and over, the detainees invoked the name of the former head of state security, Henderson, as the ultimate author of their torturous conditions. Their claims of maltreatment were said by older former detainees to be identical to what they had suffered during previous periods of repression.

One Shia political activist, aged 58, who gave his name only as Mohammed, said he had personally encountered Henderson. Mohammed, who was detained without trial for nearly five years during the 1970s, said: "The repression and torture used by the Bahraini regime is largely the work of Ian Henderson. But it wasn't just Henderson. The entire security apparatus of this country was commanded by Henderson and British officers. The Bahraini regime inherited the torture apparatus from the British who continued to run it after independence. The people who are doing the torture now were instructed and trained by British officers and their system of torture is very much in practice today."

Henderson, who was awarded the George Cross for quashing the Mau Mau uprising in Kenya during the 1950s, was installed by the UK government as head of security in Bahrain in 1968 when the country was a British protectorate and being challenged by a mainly Shia independence movement. Older Bahraini activists recalled that there was a sharp spike in repression and maltreatment of prisoners in the years following Henderson's appointment – a role he held for 30 years. In 1986 – after tens of thousands of Bahrainis had been through the prison system, many claiming horrific maltreatment – Henderson was awarded the CBE in the UK's honours list.
Mohammed said: "Britain imposed the al-Khalifa regime on the people of Bahrain and schooled these rulers in how to suppress our people trying to achieve democracy and

freedom. The British and the monarchy here enjoyed the oil wealth of this country, while we have been treated like slaves – and to keep us like slaves, our rulers have relied on British repressive know-how. They have used British divide-and-rule sectarian policies between Shia and Sunni and they have criminalised Shia people who have simply been demanding their democratic rights for many decades."

Mohammed added that Bahrain, which is also described by Washington as "an important ally", said the Gulf state was just another example of how "Western governments have employed dictators throughout the Middle East to crush people". These Western governments are now being exposed for their "criminal use of dictators".

"Everywhere the British and American governments have been involved, we see the same torture methods. Northern Ireland, Bahrain, Iraq, Afghanistan," he said. "This is the reality behind their claims of supporting democracy and human rights."

Finian Cunningham is a journalist and musician www.myspace.com/finiancunninghammusic

The original source of this article is Irish Times
Copyright © Finian Cunningham, Irish Times, 2011

Comment on Global Research Articles on our Facebook page

Become a Member of Global Research

Articles by: Finian Cunningham

About the author:

Finian Cunningham has written extensively on international affairs, with articles published in several languages. Many of his recent articles appear on the renowned Canadian-based news website Globalresearch.ca. He is a Master's graduate in Agricultural Chemistry and worked as a scientific editor for the Royal Society of Chemistry, Cambridge, England, before pursuing a career in journalism. He specialises in Middle East and East Africa issues and has also given several American radio interviews as well as TV interviews on Press TV and Russia Today. Previously, he was based in Bahrain and witnessed the political upheavals in the Persian Gulf kingdom during 2011 as well as the subsequent Saudi-led brutal crackdown against pro-democracy protests.

Disclaimer: The contents of this article are of sole responsibility of the author(s). The Centre for Research on Globalization will not be responsible for any inaccurate or incorrect statement in this article. The Centre of Research on Globalization grants

permission to cross-post Global Research articles on community internet sites as long the source and copyright are acknowledged together with a hyperlink to the original Global Research article. For publication of Global Research articles in print or other forms including commercial internet sites, contact: publications@globalresearch.ca

www.globalresearch.ca contains copyrighted material the use of which has not always been specifically authorized by the copyright owner. We are making such material available to our readers under the provisions of "fair use" in an effort to advance a better understanding of political, economic and social issues. The material on this site is distributed without profit to those who have expressed a prior interest in receiving it for research and educational purposes. If you wish to use copyrighted material for purposes other than "fair use" you must request permission from the copyright owner.

For media inquiries: publications@globalresearch.ca