HRC MUST ENSURE BAHRAIN IS ACCOUNTABLE FOR ITS HUMAN RIGHTS RECORD

Following the publication of the Report of the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry (BICI) in November 2011, the King and authorities in Bahrain pledged to implement the recommendations within the BICI Report, a commitment they reiterated during the UN Human Rights Council Universal Periodic Review (UPR) last May. These are welcome words, but the UN Human Rights Council and others looking for better human rights protection in Bahrain must not evaluate Bahrain’s human rights record by words alone. Instead, the UN Human Rights Council must both listen to the words of the Bahrain authorities and look at their actions to determine any progress in implementing both the recommendations of the BICI Report and the 176 recommendations set during the UPR process last May.

Since last May, despite pledges made by the Bahraini authorities, the human rights situation in Bahrain has deteriorated. There have been severe restrictions on peaceful assembly and protests; use of lethal weapons such as gas and pellet shots; continued arrests, including 89 children; unfair trials; and repression against human rights organisations and activists. This is taking place in the context of a campaign of hatred and slander against several opposition groups, including the dissolution of political societies such as the Teachers Association and Amal and threats against Al-Wefaq. This campaign, which has expanded to encompass members of Parliament, religious and business figures, seems to be directed at promoting sectarianism and creating a distraction from critical issues relating to human rights and political reform. At the same time, there is a push on the part of the Bahraini authorities to present a clean image to the world, and particularly to UN Human Rights mechanisms, fashioning itself as a tolerant government that is committed to human rights promotion and protection. This picture is at odds with the human rights situation on the ground, which has reached a crisis situation and is at risk of getting worse every day. It is also at odds with actions taken in respect of UN Human Rights mechanisms, including threats of reprisals against Bahraini human rights organisations participating in the UPR process and blocking internet access to the recent HRC sessions on the same topic just this past week.

Of the 176 recommendations issued in May during the UPR process, virtually no real steps have been taken to put even one of them into action. It is of critical importance that there should be no impunity for crimes committed against peaceful protesters. All those who ordered or committed torture must be removed from positions of authority, investigated and prosecuted. Most of the torturers in Bahrain are known to their victims and human rights activists, and their cases are well documented. It is imperative that political detainees and human rights defenders in detention for exercising their right to free expression and peaceful assembly are released without delay and unconditionally. In addition, ongoing violence against peaceful demonstrations and use of excessive force, including the use of tear gas as a form of collective punishment, in residential areas and in closed spaces such as houses must stop immediately. These are minimum conditions to demonstrate real commitment towards implementing recommendations from both the UPR process and the BICI report, which to date have been only been paid lip service.

The UN Human Rights Council must act to halt this deteriorating situation and adopt immediate and concrete measures to stop the violations. We, the undersigned organisations, therefore call on the Human Rights Council to appoint an envoy of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and a special rapporteur of the HRC; to schedule without delay a special session of the HRC on Bahrain; and to adopt a firm resolution at this 21st session that addresses these needs. We urge the UN Human Rights Council HRC to take these concrete steps to make Bahrain accountable and to abide by its own obligations, HRC rules and international conventions and norms.

Signed by:
Bahrain Human Rights Organisation

Together with:
Americans for Democracy and Human Rights in Bahrain
Bahrain Human Rights Society
Bahrain Rehabilitation and Anti-Violence Organisation (BRAVO)
Bahrain Youth Society for Human Rights
CIVICUS
Nonviolent Radical Party, Transnational and Transparty
No Peace Without Justice
Redress Trust
Reporters Without Borders