

## Bahrain government targeting Freedom of expression and suppressing truth by intensifying crackdown on Photographers



31 May 2011

Bahrain Center for Human Rights voices its deep concern over Bahrain's nonstop attack on the freedom of speech, expression and publishing which have been evident in their mass and brute attack on Bahraini photographers, by firing them from their jobs, assaulting them on duty and arresting them, merely, for their involvement in documenting the events of Bahrain's revolution which exposed the severe Human Rights violations by the government of Bahrain against protesters.

"A picture is worth a thousand words" a saying proven true once again by Bahrain's uprising; since February 14, photography spoke out of the peacefulness and nonviolent nature of the Bahraini protesters in pearl roundabout and revealed the legitimacy of their demands for political reforms to the world. It, also, exposed the brutality of the Bahraini government through photos of killing, arresting, torturing and terrorizing civilians.

Photographers, both professional and amateur, have had a vital role in documenting pro-democracy protests in Bahrain. During the first days and through their photos they were able to educate and inform the public of the demands of the protesters by covering their peaceful rallies[1], events calling for unity like the human chain[2] and informative and educational speeches by Bahraini intellectuals held every night in the pearl roundabout. Bahraini photographers were also active protesters with their own demands which they expressed in the photographers' rally on 28 Feb 2011; they held signs saying "A Picture delivers an effective message of Justice" and "No for arresting photographers"[3]. Whilst, international media was either banned from entering Bahrain or did not give any priority to covering Bahrain's events, it was the Bahraini photographers who have covered the violent crackdowns on the protesters by the pearl roundabout, in front of Salmaniya Medical Center[4], and by Bahrain Financial Harbor[5] by using tear gas canister, rubber bullets and live ammunition against unarmed protesters. Also, their covering exposed the role of the thugs protected by the security men in the attack on the University of Bahrain[6]. These photos and videos were soon distributed via the social networks and some of the media channels.

Their role became even more critical especially after imposing the Martial law on March 15, 2011 which limited media coverage; foreign journalists and photographers have been deported and banned from entering Bahrain and local media coverage was limited to government's official statements, in order to prevent the dissemination of information about protests. Despite of that, Bahraini photographers continued to cover the atrocities of the Bahraini government by documenting the daily security crackdowns on citizens at checkpoints[7], vandalizing their cars[8] and exposing the use of army vehicles to seize villages, although, Bahraini officials claimed that their role was to guard the vital institutions of State, not only that but they went as far as demolishing Shiite mosques and places of worship[9].

The government of Bahrain started targeting photographers and photojournalists since the early days of the uprising, at least 2 Bahraini photographers were harmed by security forces while covering protests, Mohammed Al Mukhreq , photojournalist working for Al Wasat newspaper, was assaulted while doing his job taking photos of Bahrain Financial Harbor protest on March 13, 2011. He was attacked by the government thugs who were backed up by the security forces[10] . He was kicked, beaten then briefly arrested before they released him to be rushed to get medical treatment. Abdullah Hasan, another photojournalist, working for Al Watan newspaper had his leg broken after a security car hit a pickup truck on which he was standing while covering[11] the clashes near the Financial Barbour on the same date, March 13, 2011. Mazen Mahdi, DPA reporter, was briefly arrested while taking photos of thugs attacking and destroying shops in Riffa, on March 11, 2011[12]



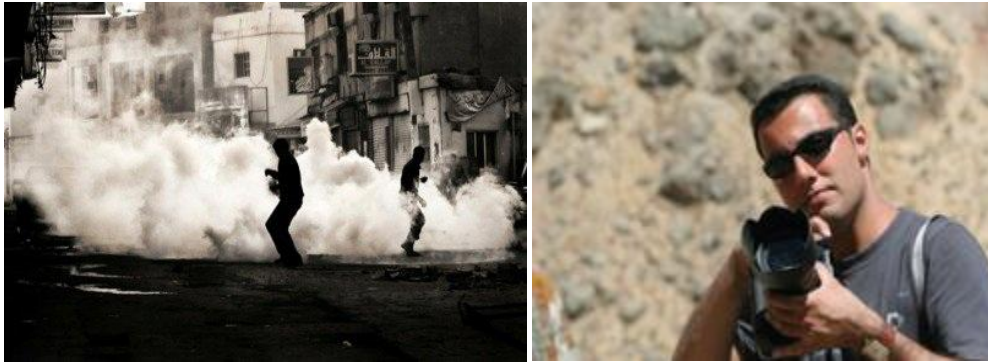
Abdullah Hasan recovering from his injury at the hospital

In its continuous attempt to suppress the freedom of speech and expression, the government has intensified its crackdown on photographers recently. After imposing the national safety law on March 15, 2011. Reports confirm that more than [20] photographers have been targeted by being sacked from their jobs, interrogated, banned from traveling and arrested after dawn home raids with their cameras and photographic equipments confiscated; some are local and international award winners, 7 of them have been arrested in one week and 4 of them arrested in one day only. [\[See List of all targeted media professionals including photographers\]](#)

The photographers, Mujtaba Salmat and Hussain Abbas Salim (known as Hussain Al-Khal), were among the firsts photographers to be arrested on 17th and 28th March, respectively. Both are members of Bahrain Society for Photography and were covering the protests in Pearls Square. Mujtaba Salmat has published these photos on his Facebook page. He was released after one month in detention.



Jameel AlShuaikh the photographer of Al Wefaq political society was arrested, on April 21, after the security forces surrounded his car in the village of Sar and forced him to step out of it, he was then beaten and forced into one of their cars. (See the video of his arrest[13] )



On May 11, early morning, Mohammed Al Shaikh, prominent freelance photographer, 13 international award winner and head of Bahrain society of Photography, was arrested[14] from his apartment in Sanabis village, his cameras and his photographic equipments were confiscated, prior to that he was sacked from his job in the Bahrain Aluminum company [15].

On May 15, the crackdown heightened even more, at least 4 photographers were arrested including Saeed Abdulla Al Dhahi's whose house got raided by security forces, he got arrested and all his cameras and other photographic equipments were confiscated, then his fiancée home got raided in search for his cameras there and they were confiscated too[16] . The mass photographers arrests also included Ali AbdulKarim Alkufi[17] , member of photography club at Bahrain Art Society and Hasan AlNasheet, the vice president of the Bahrain Society of Photography, an awards winner photographer, and associated with Islamic work society (political oppositional society targeted and many members arrested). Saeed was released after around 24 hours of detention while Ali and Hasan were held until 20 May 2011 before being released.

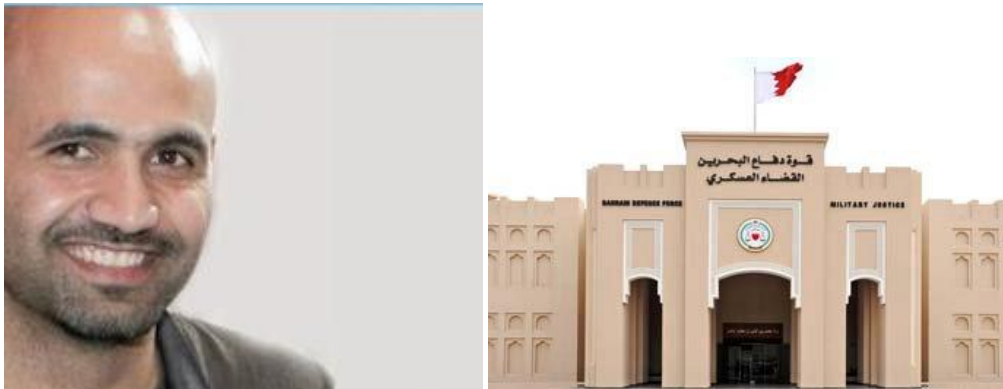
Between May 15 and 22, 2011 another five photographers were arrested, amongst them one of the founders of Bahrain Society of Photography and the Head of the technical committee in the Society, Nedhal Nooh, who was arrested on 18 May 2011 and a 17 years old Zainab Al Satrawi, a member of the Bahrain Society of Photography and a secondary school student who was pulled out of classroom while having her final exam on 22 May 2011. She was released after several hours of detention.

The arrest of photographers also included 2 professional photojournalists working for local newspapers: Mohamed Ali AlAradi, working for Al Bilad newspaper who was arrested on May 8, 2011 and Abdullah Hasan who was sacked from Al Watan newspaper just few weeks before his arrest on May 14, 2011.



Bahraini photojournalists working for Western media had their shares of government's violence towards photographers, Mazen Mahdi, who works for the German news agency DPA, was detained by police on May 22, 2011. Mahdi said he was held for several hours, handcuffed, blindfolded and beaten until a senior officer arrived to interrogate him[18] . He also said that one of the officers threatened to torture him with electric shocks; during interrogation he was cursed at for covering the recent protests, crackdowns and arrests in Bahrain[19] . He added that investigation questions were about his Twitter postings, stories published on DPA

and whether he had links to Lebanese or Iranian media. He was released after around 2 hours with the chance of being called back in again.



At least one photographer has been tried before a military court for charges related to his photography. Hasan Salman Al-Ma'atooq, 29 years old, nurse and photographer was arrested on 23 March and he has been sentenced to 3 years in jail on 12 May 2011. The charges related to photography are: [1- Fabricating pictures of the wounded. 2-Broadcasting false news and fabricated photos].[20]

As for the photographer Hussain Marzooq who was sentenced[21] on 8 Feb 2011 to 1 year in jail and BD100 fine for the crime of “transmitting photos that would bring harm to Bahrain abroad”. In the court Hussain alleged that he is being subjected to severe beating and hanging by the hands and feet in the Falaqa way, however, the judge disregard his complaint, despite the apparent marks of torture on his wrists[22] .

Most if not all of the detained people since the last crackdown in March have not been allowed to meet their families and lawyers throughout the period of detention which raises more concerns about possible ill-treatment they might be receiving in detention.

Bahrain Center for Human Rights believes that the intensifying crackdown on these prominent and active photographers aims at putting an end for their activities of dissemination of photographs that exposes the crimes of Bahrain’s regime to the world; an attempt to conceal the real image of what is happening in Bahrain from the world public opinion. Transmitting photos about the incidents in Bahrain cannot be considered a crime in any form, but it is rather the right of people to express. The arbitrary arrests and trials that target freedom of opinion and expression emphasize the government’s failure in convincing the world of the wrong image it is attempting to promote in order to justify the deteriorating human rights condition in Bahrain.

Freedom of speech and expression is a constitutional right in Bahrain[23] and a basic right for all human beings. The BCHR considers that arresting and criminalizing photographers as a blatant violation of the international charters and covenants concerned with human rights and in specific Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights which states that “Everyone has the right to freedom of expression, this right includes freedom to seek various forms of information and ideas, receive and impart it to other regardless of frontiers, either in writing or in print, in the form of art or through any other media of his choice.”

**Based on all the above, the BCHR demands the Bahraini Authorities to:**

- (1) Release all the arrested photographers,
- (2) Put an end to physical and mental abuse and torture in prisons, and to initiate a neutral, public and impartial investigation in the torture allegations and other violations, and to present the violators to justice.
- (3) Annul all the procedures that restrict freedom of opinion and expression or that prevent the transmission of information.
- (4) Attain its international commitments and respect all forms of freedom of expression and publishing as stated in the international charters and covenants.

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- [1][http://pomed.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2011/02/2011222185547169572\\_20.jpg](http://pomed.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2011/02/2011222185547169572_20.jpg)
- [2]<http://jafrianews.files.wordpress.com/2011/03/bahraini-shia-sunni-human-chain.jpg%3Fw%3D150>
- [3]<http://www.voice-hussein.com/vb/showthread.php?t=45260&page=2>
- [4]<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0s1E-eefEz0>
- [5]<http://www.arabianbusiness.com/incoming/article386425.ece/ALTERNATES/g3l/110032584.jpg>
- [6][http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C\\_6V5pJH6w8](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C_6V5pJH6w8)
- [7][checkpoints1.png](#)  
[checkpoints2.png](#)  
[checkpoints3.png](#)
- [8]<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ukpriV35efo&feature=youtu.be>
- [9]<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vqUNA19OEDA>
- [10]<http://www.alwasatnews.com/3111/news/read/532281/1.html>
- [11]<http://www.alwasatnews.com/data/2011/3112/pdf/loc9.pdf>
- [12]<http://twitter.com/MazenMahdi/status/46004071093633024>
- [13]<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gCWm4KPCecI>
- [14]<http://en.rsf.org/bahrain-news-photographers-among-crackdown-17-05-2011,40301.html>
- [15]<http://bahrainrights.hopto.org/ar/node/4149>
- [16]<https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?pid=321499&id=143818639019162>
- [18]<http://www.flickr.com/people/alialkofipphoto/>
- [18]<http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/05/23/bahrain-journalists-idUSLDE74M1Y820110523>  
<http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/4c877cd2-8543-11e0-871e-00144feabdc0.html#axzz1NBsh685K>
- [19][http://www.monstersandcritics.com/news/middleeast/news/article\\_1640917.php/Bahrain-police-detain-dpa-reporter](http://www.monstersandcritics.com/news/middleeast/news/article_1640917.php/Bahrain-police-detain-dpa-reporter)
- [20]<http://byshr.org/?p=437> and  
<http://byshr.org/?p=458>
- [22]<http://www.alwasatnews.com/3078/news/read/526211/1.html>
- [23]<http://www.bahrainrights.org/en/node/3513>
- [24] Bahrain Constitution – Article 23