



‘Bite the Bullet’

A Year on from the Foreign Affairs
Committee Report on the UK
Relationship with Bahrain

December 2014

BIRD
BAHRAIN INSTITUTE FOR
RIGHTS & DEMOCRACY



'Bite the Bullet'

A Year On from the Foreign Affairs Committee
Report on the UK Relationship with Bahrain

December 2014

©2014, Bahrain Institute for Rights and Democracy (BIRD). All rights reserved.

The Bahrain Institute for Rights and Democracy is a UK based non-profit organisation focusing on advocacy, education and awareness for the calls of democracy and human rights in Bahrain.

www.birdbh.org
[@birdbahrain_](https://twitter.com/birdbahrain_)

Table of Contents

Summary	4
Introduction	5
Country of Concern	8
Implementation of the BICI	10
Political Developments	14
Engagement with UN Mechanisms	16
Conclusion	18
Unconditional Support: FCO Public Statements	19
Conclusion	24
Defence Relations	25
Case Studies	26
Conclusion	27
Conclusion and Recommendations	28

Summary

This report is a follow-up on the Foreign Affairs Committee's (FAC) inquiry into the UK's relations with Saudi Arabia and Bahrain, the findings of which were published in November 2013. It looks specifically at the UK government's relationship with Bahrain and offers an analysis of the government's response following recommendations made by the FAC.

This report examines:

- The FAC's recommendation for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) to list Bahrain as a "Country of Concern" in its 2014 Human Rights Report. This report analyses why the FCO failed to do so, despite Bahrain meeting the criteria for classification.
- The FAC's concerns over the criticism received by the UK in its capacity as a "critical friend" of Bahrain. It analyses whether the UK's relationship has indeed been damaged, why that might be so, and how it may be improved.
- The FAC's recommendation that the British relationship with Bahrain should not disregard the human rights situation in Bahrain. It finds that, in most respects, the FCO has treated Bahrain's human rights situation uncritically, damaging both the UK's reputation and Bahraini domestic progress.
- The FAC's recommendation that the UK take human rights concerns into account when considering arms sales to Bahrain. It compares the defence relations between Bahrain and South Korea and Bahrain and the United States as case studies in how a change in arms trade policy can positively impact human rights in the country.

The report broadly finds that, whilst the UK publically positions itself as a "critical friend" of Bahrain, it has prevented positive reforms from taking place in the country. The FCO has actively failed to condemn human rights abuses in Bahrain at a time when other major actors, including the U.S. State Department, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, the European Parliament, Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International and local human rights organisations have condemned recent negative developments.

In the year since the publishing of the FAC's findings, the human rights situation continues to deteriorate in Bahrain. The FCO has largely ignored many of these emerging problems, choosing instead to highlight - uncritically - limited developments such as the establishment of the Ombudsman Office and the recently held National Assembly elections. The FAC reiterated its call for Bahrain to be designated a country of concern in its November 2014 report. This report recommends that the FCO re-evaluate its response to human rights situation in Bahrain to the effect of promoting actual reforms to bring an end to the deteriorating human rights situation, and for the FCO to designate Bahrain a "country of concern" in its 2015 Human Rights Report.

Introduction

“We see little or no evidence that Bahrain has made enough progress in implementing political reform and safeguarding human rights, and we believe that the FCO should have bitten the bullet and designated Bahrain as a country of concern.”¹

Foreign Affairs Committee, 2014

On 19 September 2012 the UK Foreign Affairs Committee (FAC) announced an inquiry into the UK government’s relationship with Saudi Arabia and Bahrain.² The Committee invited written submissions to investigate the UK’s foreign policy aims following significant disturbances in the region, including the effects of the ‘Arab Spring’ and the war in Syria.³

In February 2011, a pro-democracy movement sparked protests in Bahrain, fuelled by similar human rights movements in Tunisia and Egypt a month earlier. The government of Bahrain responded brutally, and in March 2011 they declared a state of emergency lasting until June 2011. During that time, and in the period following, security forces committed severe human rights abuses including practices of systematic torture, arbitrary arrests and extrajudicial killing.

In November 2011, the King accepted a report produced by the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry (BICI), which investigated the government response during the first few months of the uprising and produced recommendations to the government of Bahrain. The report confirmed widespread and systematic violations of international human rights conventions, making sweeping recommendations towards their resolution. Unfortunately, Bahrain has largely side-lined these recommendations, and many of the issues persist today.

The 2013 inquiry provided a key opportunity for the UK to reassess its relationship with Bahrain amidst widespread criticism over unwavering support for the Gulf Kingdom. The FAC investigated UK foreign policy priorities in defence, energy security and counter terrorism, and the effectiveness of the government at balancing its interests with human rights priorities. The inquiry also looked at the implications of the 2011 uprising in Bahrain and how the UK could encourage democratic reform in the region. Since 2011, the UK had been severely criticised for its response to the government response to the protest movement in Bahrain by human rights organisations,⁴ Members of the UK Parliament and Bahraini activists.⁵

¹ Foreign Affairs Committee (FAC), *The FCO’s Human Rights Work in 2013*, Commons Select

² FAC, *The UK’s relations with Saudi Arabia and Bahrain*, Commons Select Committee, 19 September 2012, <http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/foreign-affairs-committee/news/uk-relations-with-saudi-arabia-and-bahrain/>, (accessed 24 November 2014)

³ FAC, *The UK’s Relationship with Saudi Arabia and Bahrain (FAC Report)*, Foreign Affairs Committee Contents, 2013, <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201314/cmselect/cmfaaff/88/88.pdf>, (accessed 20 November 2014), para. 4.

⁴ Human Rights Watch, *Dispatches: Time to Stand Up for Bahrain’s Dissidents*, 1 September 2014, <http://www.hrw.org/news/2014/09/01/dispatches-time-stand-bahrain-s-dissidents> (accessed 3 December 2014)

The FAC report made a number of key findings and recommendations for the UK government to re-establish itself in the region as a force for democratic reform. In looking at the human rights situation in Bahrain, the committee argued:

“The aggressive way in which the Bahraini security forces handled events in 2011 has deeply damaged Bahrain’s reputation. The recommendations of the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry (BICI) were sensible and the Bahraini government’s failure fully to implement them is inexplicable. The [UK] Government must press Bahrain to move forward urgently with reform, and if no greater progress is seen, it should designate Bahrain a Country of Concern in its next human rights report.”⁶

The FAC report expressed concerns over criticisms levelled at the UK government’s relationship with Bahrain in light of the human rights abuses taking place there. Although the FAC stated that the UK is “getting the balance of its interests and values broadly right in the region” it argued that it is “failing to explain its approach to the public”.⁷ It further argued that despite its relationship with Bahrain, “British engagement and support should not be unconditional in the face of continued violations and slow implementation of reforms. There is a danger to the UK’s credibility if it allows itself to become associated with the problems in Bahrain rather than solutions”.⁸ The FAC had moreover already criticised the FCO’s approach to Bahrain prior to its 2013 inquiry. For example following the 2012 Formula One race that was held in Bahrain, it argued:

“We find it difficult to discern any consistency of logic behind the government’s policy in not taking a public stance on the Bahrain Grand Prix but implementing at least a partial boycott of the 2012 Uefa Football Championship matches played in Ukraine.”⁹

The committee provided the UK government a valuable opportunity to reappraise its approach to the situation in Bahrain that has received widespread condemnation from rights organisations and the public. It made recommendations for the government to re-think its public response to the human rights abuses in Bahrain, list the Kingdom as a “Country of Concern” in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office annual human rights report and hold meetings with members of Bahrain civil society and non-government organisations to hear their concerns.

⁵ International Business Times, *Nabeel Rajab Interview: Bahrain ‘Bought British Government’s Silence’ Over Human Rights Violations*, 31 July 2014, <http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/nabeel-rajab-interview-bahrain-bought-british-governments-silence-over-human-rights-1459196> (3 December 2014)

⁶ FAC, *The UK’s Relationship with Saudi Arabia and Bahrain (FAC Report)*, Foreign Affairs Committee Contents, 2013, <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201314/cmselect/cmfaff/88/8805.htm#a1>, (accessed 20 November 2014), para. 160.

⁷ See footnote 1.

⁸ *FAC Report*, para. 41.

⁹ ‘Government Criticised Over Refusal to Back Boycott of Bahrain Grand Prix,’ *Guardian*, 17 October 2012, <http://www.theguardian.com/sport/2012/oct/17/government-criticised-bahrain-grand-prix>, (accessed 26 November 2014).

As this report will highlight, the UK government has unfortunately largely missed this opportunity to promote democratic reform in the region. Instead, it seems to have taken a more resolute and uncompromising stance in its relationship with Bahrain, in effect insulating the Kingdom from having to undertake any meaningful reform. Criticism against the UK has risen substantially over this stance,¹⁰ and the human rights abuses in Bahrain have continued amidst a culture of impunity.

¹⁰ *FAC Report*, para. 158.

Country of Concern

*“We expressed concern last year that the process of identifying “countries of concern” becomes devalued if political and strategic factors are allowed to colour decisions, as we believed had happened in relation to Bahrain (which had, as in this year’s report, been treated as a ‘case study’ rather than a ‘country of concern’)”*¹¹

Foreign Affairs Committee, 2012

Following criticism made by the FAC in 2011 and 2012 over the FCO’s decision not to list Bahrain as a “Country of Concern” in its 2012 Annual Human Rights Report,¹² it recommended once again for the FCO to do so in 2014. Despite criticisms of the system, the FAC argued that the process of listing countries of concern serves as a public declaration by the UK that the human rights situation in those countries are far from what is internationally acceptable.¹³ This would provide public pressure on countries to improve upon their human rights obligations by being subjected to greater international monitoring. The FAC argued that Bahrain should have been listed as such following the events in 2011 and used its non-designation as an example of their misgivings about the entire system.¹⁴ Public criticism in the FCO report would send a strong message that Bahrain must do more to improve its human rights record and send a message to human rights organisations that government regards country failures in human rights as warranting disapproval.

The FAC noted in its 2013 report that Bahrain should be listed as a country of concern in 2014 if there is ‘no significant progress’ in Bahrain’s implementation of the BICI reforms, no serious engagement in political dialogue and cooperation with UN mechanisms remains scarce.¹⁵ This recommendation, if implemented, might inspire honest and positive reform in Bahrain. The FAC claimed in 2012 that by classifying a state in this category, a strong signal would be sent to the country concerned that *“Government regards failings in human rights standards as grave enough to warrant a prominent statement of disapproval”*.¹⁶

The government found itself subject to significant criticism following its decision in 2012, which the FAC believed to be strongly influenced by political and strategic interests.¹⁷ The Committee argued that the case of Bahrain *“illustrates many of our misgivings about the system for*

¹¹ FAC, *The FCO’s Human Rights Work in 2012*, Fourth Report, October 2013, <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201314/cmselect/cmffaff/267/26706.htm>, (accessed 28 November 2014), para. 8.

¹² FAC, *The FCO Human Rights Work in 2011*, Third Report of Session 2012-13, 11 September 2012, <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201213/cmselect/cmffaff/116/116.pdf>, (accessed 28 November 2014), para. 39.

¹³ *Ibid*, para. 42.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, para. 39.

¹⁵ *FAC Report*, para. 214.

¹⁶ FAC, *The FCO Human Rights Work in 2011*, Third Report of Session 2012-13, 11 September 2012, para. 118.

¹⁷ *Ibid*.

designating ‘countries of concern’.¹⁸ It questioned the FCO’s decision to not list Bahrain as a “Country of Concern” in 2012 following 2011 political crisis, highlighting systematic torture, mass arrests, extrajudicial killings, military courts trying civilians, and the targeted arrests and torture of medical personnel as potential reasons for reclassification.¹⁹

Giving evidence to the FAC during their 2013 investigation, David Mepham, UK Director of Human Rights Watch (HRW), stated, “*our concern at Human Rights Watch is that, despite the new criteria, you have some very important countries ... that are consistent with the criteria, that are not included in the countries of concern section in the most recent human rights and democracy report.*”²⁰ He named Bahrain as one of them.

These criteria had been vague in the past, providing the government space to refrain from adding countries to the concern list that they perceived would impact policy interests. The FAC criticised this in its Eighth Report and recommended that the FCO define more clearly the criteria of being a “Country of Concern”.²¹ The FCO responded by listing four key criteria for such classification. These are:

1. The gravity of the human rights situation in the country, including both the severity of particular abuses and the range of human rights affected;
2. Whether a deterioration or improvement in the human rights situation in the country would have a wider impact in the region;
3. Whether the human rights situation in the country has an impact on wider UK interests; and
4. How active the UK is in the country and our level of engagement there.²²

The FAC recommended that the last two criteria should not apply, however found that in 2014, the FCO was still influenced by these criteria in the final decision of listing countries of concern.²³ In keeping with the FAC’s recommendations, this report will focus on the first of the FCO’s criteria with regards to Bahrain. It will be found through a discussion of the FAC’s criteria that the FCO’s criteria are also met.

The FCO did not list Bahrain as a “Country of Concern” in its 2014 Annual Human Rights Report, despite ample evidence that it should and despite Bahrain meeting these new criteria of

¹⁸ *Ibid*, para. 39.

¹⁹ *Ibid*.

²⁰ Mepham, D., Minutes of Evidence, HC 267, Foreign Affairs Committee, 11 June 2013, <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201314/cmselect/cmfaaff/267/26706.htm#a1>, (accessed 28 November 2014).

²¹ FAC, *The FCO’s Human Rights Work in 2010-11, Vol. I*, 20 July 2011, <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201012/cmselect/cmfaaff/964/964.pdf>, (accessed 4 December 2014), para. 54.

²² FAC, *The FCO’s Human Rights Work in 2012*, Fourth Report, October 2013, <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201314/cmselect/cmfaaff/267/26706.htm>, (accessed 28 November 2014), para. 9.

²³ FCO, *Human Rights and Democracy: 2012 FCO Report*, Cm 8593, April 2013, page 120.

inclusion listed above. This was a missed opportunity for the FCO to impose real pressure on the government of Bahrain to mend its human rights record. Instead of designating Bahrain a “Country of Concern”, the FCO has instead designated it as a “case study”; a new category created in 2011 following the Arab Spring. As a case study country, Bahrain was presented as a progressive State. It may be noted here that Saudi Arabia is currently listed as countries of concern, despite the UK seeing “positive developments” in its human rights. The FAC argued this inconsistency in 2011, stating that it did not understand how Saudi Arabia was listed as a country of concern, when the UK saw positive developments in its human rights, and Bahrain was not.²⁴

In their 6th report of 2014, the FAC harshly criticised the FCO again for not listing Bahrain as a country of concern in its 2014 Human Rights Report and called on them to “bite the bullet” and do so.²⁵ It went further in criticising the ‘case study’ category and argued that political and strategic interests in some of the countries listed under the category “colour[ed] decisions”.²⁶ It argued that there were no improvements in both political reform and human rights in Bahrain which warranted its listing as a country of concern. BIRD welcomes this assessment by the Foreign Affairs Committee.

The following chapter demonstrates that Bahrain meets the FAC’s three criteria to become a “Country of Concern”, these being a failure to implement the BICI, failures to engage in meaningful political dialogue, and failure to engage with UN mechanisms. The remainder of the chapter is split by these three criteria. It will discuss these issues in relation to the FCO’s own criteria, listed above, through a discussion of British engagement with Bahrain in these three areas.

Implementation of the BICI

The Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry was established in June 2011 to investigate human rights abuses committed in Bahrain between February and June of that year, when the government of Bahrain suppressed a large-scale protest movement. The BICI submitted their report containing 26 recommendations to the King of Bahrain in November 2011, and the government thereupon began a reform programme based around this report.

The report recommended the establishment of bodies which may enforce accountability for torture and death of civilians; (recommendation 1716, 1719, 1722(a), 1722(b)); to independently monitor the detention process (1722(d)); to review all 2011 military court cases in civil courts (1720); to train prosecutors and judiciary (1722(f)); to drop all charges relating to free speech (1722(h)); compensate victims and families of torture, ill-treatment and prolonged incommunicado detention (1722(j), 1722(k)).

²⁴ FAC, *The FCO’s Human Rights Work 2011*, (November 2014), <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201213/cmselect/cmffaff/116/116.pdf> (accessed 4 December 2014) para. 41.

²⁵ FAC, *The FCO’s Human Rights Work 2013*, (November 2014), <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201415/cmselect/cmffaff/551/551.pdf>, (accessed 4 December 2014).

²⁶ *Ibid*, paras. 9-10.

In view of being succinct, this report will focus both on the broad implementation of the BICI and the specific implementation of recommendation 1717 to establish an independent Ombudsman office, which may investigate complaints made against the Ministry of Interior.²⁷ The BICI inquiry was the basis upon which the reform program was to be based, but by 2014 Bahrain's allies and international NGOs were both expressing a disappointment at a lack of positive follow-up.

The United States State Department Annual Human Rights Report 2014 observed that:

*"The most serious human rights problems included citizens' inability to change their government peacefully; arrest and detention of protesters on vague charges, in some cases leading to their torture in detention; and lack of due process in trials of political and human rights activists, medical personnel, teachers, and students, with some trials resulting in harsh sentences."*²⁸

Freedom House also reported a significant downward trend in Bahrain's civil liberties, political rights and overall freedom rating in 2013.²⁹ An Amnesty International report on the arbitrary detention and torture of children in Bahrain found that the criminal justice system has treated children like adults and contravenes international standards of justice.³⁰ The Committee to Protect Journalists ranked Bahrain second in number of journalists imprisoned (per capita) in the world in 2013, and three remain in prison until now.³¹ The Human Rights Watch 2014 Annual World Report, published in January 2014, summed up the year's developments thus: *"Bahrain's human rights record regressed further in key areas in 2013 and the government made little real progress regarding reforms it claimed to pursue."*³²

The chair of the BICI, Cherif Bassiouni, has also voiced criticism of the BICI's implementation. In a June 2014 interview with Al-Monitor, he stated that Bahrain's implementation of his inquiry's recommendations, which include the establishment of the Ombudsman, have been 'piecemeal' and leave much to be desired.³³ In 2012 he called the government's actions after the report a

²⁷ Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry, *Report of the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry (BICI Report)*, (November 2011), <http://www.bici.org.bh/BICireportEN.pdf>, (accessed 4 December 2014), para. 1717.

²⁸ Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, U.S. State Department, 'Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2013,' (2014), <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/index.htm#wrapper> (accessed 26 November 2014).

²⁹ Freedom House, *Bahrain - Freedom in the World 2014*, 2014, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2014/bahrain-0#.VIBUqDGsWSo>, (accessed 4 December 2014).

³⁰ Amnesty International, *Bahrain: Children in a Maze of Injustice*, (2013), <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/MDE11/057/2013/en/80b7e23b-1296-4620-b66c-a1ee5fec94d8/mde110572013en.pdf>, (accessed 4 December 2014).

³¹ Committee to Protect Journalists, *Attacks on the Press: Bahrain*, <https://cpj.org/2014/02/attacks-on-the-press-in-2013-bahrain.php>, (accessed 4 December 2014).

³² Human Rights Watch, 'Bahrain,' in *World Report 2014*, (2014), <http://www.hrw.org/world-report/2014/country-chapters/bahrain>, (accessed 18 November 2014).

³³ Al-Monitor, *Bassiouni: Bahrain's progress limited by "piecemeal" approach to reforms*, 13 June 2014, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2014/06/cherif-bassiouni-bici-bahrain-uprising-violations.html#>, (accessed 19 November 2014).

'whitewash' in one interview,³⁴ and on another occasion described government actions as 'inadequate'.³⁵

Three years from the BICI report, core recommendations to rebuild confidence in the government's claims have yet to be implemented, including measures ensuring top-level accountability and security reforms. Two NGO reports covered this extensively in 2012 and found no positive steps taken towards ensuring accountability, prosecuting individuals for acts of torture and compensating victims.³⁶ Despite the establishment of an Ombudsman office to investigate prison conditions and similar actions, the government of Bahrain's response has lacked real substance.

Yet if the U.S. State Department, HRW, Freedom House and Amnesty International all described Bahrain in bleak terms, the FCO's own human rights report was optimistic in comparison. Published in April 2014, the country case study stated that '2013 saw some positive developments for human rights in Bahrain, but a number of concerns still remain.'³⁷ The FCO further claimed that it saw progress in the judicial and security areas, praised the establishment of the Ombudsman office in 2013 and stressed that due legal process must always be followed.³⁸

This is in conflict with the 2014 HRW report on Bahrain's judicial system, which found that judicial practice there is "*impossible to reconcile with even the minimum standards of justice.*"³⁹ HRW found that the justice system has served to protect those implicated in torture, disregarded evidence of torture and ill-abuse, and treated political dissent as being more dangerous than official criminality. The FCO does not appear to have consulted any of the publicly available research concerning the justice system, and its commendations of judicial progress run at odds with the available information and analysis.

³⁴ Cherif Bassiouni calls Bahrain actions Post BICI "Whitewash", BahrainJDM, (Mirror of Russia Today news piece), 25 January 2012, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WpNxjefE4N4>, (accessed 20 November 2014).

³⁵ HRW, *Bahrain: Promises Unkept, Rights Still Violated*, Human Rights Watch, 22 November 2012, <http://www.hrw.org/news/2012/11/22/bahrain-promises-unkept-rights-still-violated>, (accessed 20 November 2014).

³⁶ Project for Middle East Democracy, *One Year Later: Assessing Bahrain's Implementation of the BICI Report*, (November 2012), <http://pomed.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/One-Year-Later-Assessing-Bahraains-Implementation-of-the-BICI-Report.pdf>, (accessed 26 November 2014). ADHRB, *Failing Grade: A Report Card on the Implementation Status of the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry Report*, ADHRB, (November 2012), <http://adhrb.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/Failing-Grade-20121.pdf> (accessed 26 November 2014).

³⁷ FCO, *Country case study: Bahrain – progress on reform implementation*, 10 April 2014, <https://www.gov.uk/government/case-studies/country-case-study-bahrain-progress-on-reform-implementation>, (accessed 18 November 2014).

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ HRW, *Criminalizing Dissent, Entrenching Impunity*, (May 2014), http://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/bahrain0514_forUpload.pdf, (accessed 28 November 2014), p. 5.

In the FCO's October 2014 update of its Bahrain case study, it stated that despite some major issues, there exists evidence of "real efforts being made in areas where human rights concerns remain."⁴⁰ It commended the Ombudsman Office, as well as the new Prisoners and Detainees Rights Commission, which published its first report in August,⁴¹ and the National Institute for Human Rights (NIHR), which also published its first annual report this September.⁴²

These new institutions have been credited as hallmarks of recent human rights reforms. Though Bahrain must be credited for their introduction, the implementation of these reforms has been weak. But a July 2014 report by Americans for Democracy and Human Rights in Bahrain (ADHRB) and BIRD argued:

*"Neither the Office of the Ombudsman of the Ministry of the Interior nor the Bahrain National Institute for Human Rights demonstrate the necessary independence from the government and have failed to take proper action in the face of human rights abuses ... far from displaying behaviour characteristic of human rights defenders, the institutions appear more supportive of continuing the government status quo of restricting citizens' human rights."*⁴³

Neither ADHRB's report on the Ombudsman and NIHR nor HRW's on the judicial system appear to have been consulted by the FCO when forming its verdict, and the FCO's assessment of these organisations has been uncritical.

Nabeel Rajab, President of the Bahrain Center for Human Rights and Under Secretary-General of the International Federation for Human Rights, criticised the FCO's limited call for an adherence to due legal process. He described the legal process as "twisted" and stated that, instead of reforming the judicial system, the government of Bahrain has instead introduced several laws since 2011 which disrespect human rights and which have been used to target human rights defenders.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ FCO, *Bahrain – Country case study update*, 16 October 2014, <https://www.gov.uk/government/case-studies/bahrain-country-case-study-update>, (accessed 18 November 2014).

⁴¹ International Ombudsman Institute, *BAHRAIN: Prisoners and Detainees Rights Commission releases first inspection report*, 28 August 2014, <http://www.theioi.org/news/bahrain-prisoners-and-detainees-rights-commission-releases-first-inspection-report>, (accessed 19 November 2014).

⁴² Bahrain National Institute for Human Rights, 'Annual Report of the National Institution for Human Rights', (September 2014), [http://www.nihr.org.bh/Media/pdf/NIHR_ANNUAL_REPORT_2013_\(ENG\).pdf](http://www.nihr.org.bh/Media/pdf/NIHR_ANNUAL_REPORT_2013_(ENG).pdf), (accessed 19 November 2014).

⁴³ Americans for Democracy and Human Rights in Bahrain (ADHRB), *Subservient and Unaccountable: A Shadow Report on the Bahraini Ministry of the Interior's Ombudsman and Bahrain National Institute for Human Rights*, (July 2014), http://birdbh.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/ADHRB_Mechanism_Final-0814_Web.pdf, (accessed 19 November 2014). pp. 6, 15-6, 28-31. Nowhere is the Ombudsman Office's questionable effectiveness more evident than in the person of its Secretary-General, Nawaf Al-Moawda. Al-Moawda previously worked in the public prosecution's office, which plays an integral role in convicting prisoners and has committed serious violations of both Bahraini and international law in the past. Human rights NGOs have documented numerous cases of malpractice, where convictions made were based on confessions extracted under duress or torture.

⁴⁴ Nabeel Rajab, *Detained for a Tweet, But We Have No Fear to Speak Out!* Huffington Post, 14 November 2014, http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/nabeel-rajab/nabeel-rajab_b_6146364.html, (accessed 18 November 2014).

Overall, BIRD finds major setbacks in Bahrain's implementation of the BICI recommendations. Where applied, the reforms have been half-hearted and incomplete. This report focuses on the Ombudsman due to it being off-cited as a mark of the progress Bahrain has made. Yet its lack of independence severely limits its credibility as a monitoring body. The issues inherent in the Ombudsman office's establishment are recurring throughout Bahrain's post-BICI reforms.

Political Developments

Political developments prior to the release of the FCO's Human Rights Report, released 10 April 2014, were used as justification to not list Bahrain as a "Country of Concern". On 21 January 2014, Dr. Julian Huppert MP asked the Foreign Secretary in the House of Commons if, in light of Human Rights Watch's assessment of a downturn of the human rights record, he would accept the FAC's recommendation and designate Bahrain a "Country of Concern".⁴⁵ The FCO defended its decision not to designate Bahrain in light of the then-recent move by the Crown Prince Salman Bin Hamad Al-Khalifa to re-ignite talks with the opposition, which had fallen apart in late 2013.⁴⁶

But the FCO Human Rights Report's findings are contrary to those of both local and international human rights organisations whom have reported political stalemate in Bahrain. A number of reports published contemporaneously to the Human Rights Report 2014 offer an analysis of this political stalemate. BIRD, the Bahrain Center for Human Rights (BCHR) and the Bahrain Youth Society for Human Rights published a joint statement which catalogued human rights abuses in the run up to the annual Formula One Grand Prix, held on 7 April 2014.⁴⁷ The statement found at least 26 individuals had been arbitrarily arrested, including a child whom the arresting officer hit with his gun twice. Overnight house raids were also common in this period.

In the same week, on 9 April, rights groups observed the third anniversary of Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja's 2011 arrest. Al-Khawaja, a human rights defender and founding member of the BCHR, is serving a life sentence for his leading role in the February 2011 protests.⁴⁸ Al-Khawaja's situation has not improved since, and in August 2014 he went on a hunger strike in protest of his arbitrary detention, lasting 30 days.⁴⁹ These listed developments could not be considered by the FCO for its April report, having occurred too late for it to do so, they reflect a

⁴⁵ House of Commons debate, 21 January 2014, Hansard, http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201314/cmhansrd/cm140121/debtext/140121-0001.htm#140121-0001.htm_spnew31, (accessed 18 November 2014).

⁴⁶ *Ibid.* BBC, *Time is running out as Bahrain tries to revive national dialogue*, 30 January 2014, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-25918628>, (accessed 18 November 2014).

⁴⁷ BIRD, *Joint-Report: Human Rights Violations in Bahrain during Formula One Race Period*, 7 April 2014, <http://birdbh.org/2014/04/joint-report-human-rights-violations-in-bahrain-during-formula-one-race-period/>, (accessed 18 November 2014).

⁴⁸ BIRD, *Third Anniversary of Arrest: Calls for the Release of Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja*, 11 April 2014, <http://birdbh.org/2014/04/third-anniversary-of-arrest-calls-for-the-release-of-abdulhadi-al-khawaja/>, (accessed 18 November 2014).

⁴⁹ Gulf Center for Human Rights, *Bahrain: Prominent human rights defenders Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja ends his hunger strike*, 22 September 2014, <http://gc4hr.org/news/view/756>, (accessed 18 November 2014).

deterioration in Bahrain's human rights record which has occurred over a longer period which was in the FCO report's scope.⁵⁰

Bahrain recently held elections.⁵¹ However, with over 4,000 estimated political prisoners behind bars,⁵² including political opposition leaders known as the "Bahrain 13",⁵³ among them Hassan Mashaima and Ibrahim Sharif,⁵⁴ no election can be considered free or fair. U.S. President Obama affirmed in May 2011 that a political dialogue cannot take place when opposition leaders are in prison.⁵⁵ Yet these same opposition leaders remain behind bars until today, even after the November 2014 elections.

Civil and political rights remain limited in Bahrain. The U.S. State Department recognised these issues in its own 2014 human rights report and, in relation to the political deadlock, stated that new limits on civil societies continued to hinder reform and reconciliation.⁵⁶ The U.S. criticism was prescient. A 2013 law bans non-governmental political actors from meeting with foreign officials without governmental permission and oversight of all meetings. The FAC were 'particularly concerned' in their report by this law,⁵⁷ and though the FCO also "expressed concern", they stated in their response to the FAC's report that "*there has been no impact on our Embassy's engagement and our staff continue to meet regularly with individuals and groups*

⁵⁰ Q443, Foreign Affairs - Minutes of Evidence, HC88, 18 June 2013 <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201314/cmselect/cmfaff/88/130618.htm> (accessed 02 December 2014). The Huffington Post, *Bahrain's Maryam Al-Khawaja Wants to Tell You About the Arab Revolt We've All Forgotten*, 17 May 2014, http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2014/05/16/bahrain-maryam-al-khawaja_n_5337616.html (accessed 02 December 2014). Then FCO Minister for the Middle East, Alistair Burt, justified Al-Khawaja's imprisonment by claiming that he (and others) are being held on "other charges" as opposed to only charges related to his freedom of expression. Al-Khawaja's family has argued that his torture is medically documented in the BICI, and thus his case should be dropped. His daughter, Maryam Al-Khawaja, expressed a lack of faith in the FCO's statement: "*the FCO to make that claim about 'evidence' is just ridiculous.*"

⁵¹ See pp. 22-23.

⁵² 'Advocacy Associate Engages Interactive Dialogue on Arbitrary Detention at HRC27,' Americans for Democracy and Human Rights in Bahrain, 14 September 2014, <http://adhrb.org/2014/09/adhrb-advocacy-associate-engages-agenda-item-3-interactive-dialogue-at-hrc27/>, (accessed 3 December 2014).

⁵³ The Bahrain 13 are thirteen politicians, human rights defenders, journalists and civil society members who were arrested between March and April 2011. All thirteen were sentenced between five years and a life sentence on a single day by a military court in June 2011. A civilian appeals court upheld their sentences in 2012. All of the Bahrain 13 remain in prison.

⁵⁴ Mashaima is the Secretary-General of the Haq Movement for Liberty and Democracy. Ibrahim Sharif is the Secretary-General of the National Democratic Action Society (Wa'ad). Haq is a banned political party, while Wa'ad participated in both the 2006 and 2010 elections, though they won no seats. Both were arrested on 17 March 2011. Mashaima is serving a life sentence, while Sharif is serving 5 years. Both allege they were tortured.

⁵⁵ White House, *Remarks by the President on the Middle East and North Africa*, 19 May 2011, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/05/19/remarks-president-middle-east-and-north-africa%20>, (accessed 3 December 2014).

⁵⁶ Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, U.S. State Department, *Introduction to the 2013 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices*, <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/220287.pdf>, (accessed 20 November 2014).

⁵⁷ *FAC Report*, para. 201.

from political societies, including the opposition.⁵⁸ The law was not put into practice until later in 2014, when U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for Human Rights, Tom Malinowski, was expelled after meeting with the opposition Al-Wefaq.⁵⁹

The FCO's response has created severe criticism against the UK government over its approach to the situation in Bahrain. HRW noted in January 2014 that the FCO has refused to call for the release of Nabeel Rajab during his imprisonment and other political and human rights activists convicted in unfair trials, even as they condemned similar arbitrary detention cases in Burma.⁶⁰

Engagement with UN Mechanisms

The government of Bahrain continues to ignore the UN Human Rights Council Universal Periodic Review (UPR) recommendations.⁶¹ In 2012, member states of the UN Human Rights Council submitted 176 recommendations to the government of Bahrain as part of the second 4-year cycle of its UPR. These recommendations were broad in scope and covered a range of human rights issues, including labour rights and women's rights. The UPR recommendations in many cases reaffirmed the recommendations of the BICI. Bahrain accepted the majority of the 176 recommendations, but the government has since failed to proactively implement them. ADHRB's 2014 follow-up report on the implementation of the UPR recommendations found that this "second chance" after the BICI was squandered, and that tensions have only continued to escalate, as the human rights situation deteriorates.⁶²

The UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) has made several statements noting concerns and criticisms over Bahrain's human rights record. The most recent was made in the 26th session of the UNHRC between 10-27 June 2014. 47 States signed a joint-statement calling on Bahrain to take further steps in addressing its human rights issues.⁶³ The Bahrain delegation at the UN did not accept the joint statement, stating that "*extremists find in such statements an excuse to continue crisis-mongering and political and security escalation in Bahrain*".⁶⁴ Such responses threaten to undermine the UN's human rights work with Bahrain.

⁵⁸ FCO, *Government response to the House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee's fifth report of session 2013-2014 (HC88) on the UK's relations with Saudi Arabia and Bahrain*, 22 January 2014, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/government-response-to-the-house-of-commons-foreign-affairs-committees-fifth-report-of-session-2013-2014-hc88>, (accessed 2 December 2014), p. 19.

⁵⁹ BBC, *US diplomat Tom Malinowski expelled from Bahrain*, 7 July 2014, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-28204511>, (accessed 2 December 2014). See p. 28.

⁶⁰ McGeehan, N., *Dispatches: UK Awards Torture with a Royal Visit*, Human Rights Watch, 16 January 2014, <http://www.hrw.org/news/2014/01/16/dispatches-uk-awards-torture-royal-visit>, (accessed 20 November 2014).

⁶¹ ADHRB, *A Follow-Up Report on Bahrain's UPR Second Cycle: The Deteriorating Human Rights Situation in Bahrain*, (February 2014), http://adhrb.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/ADHRB_February2014_web.pdf, (accessed 20 November 2014).

⁶² ADHRB, *A Follow-Up Report on Bahrain's UPR Second Cycle*, p. 5.

⁶³ BIRD, *UN Human Rights Council Issue Joint-Statement on Bahrain at 26th Session*, 10 June 2014, <http://birdbh.org/2014/06/un-human-rights-council-issue-joint-statement-on-bahrain-at-26th-session/>, (accessed 2 December 2014).

⁶⁴ Toumi, H., *Bahrain reject UNHRC statement charges*, Gulf News, 11 June 2014, <http://gulfnnews.com/news/gulf/bahrain/bahrain-rejects-unhrc-statement-charges-1.1345840>, (accessed 3 December 2014).

Bahrain has failed to follow the opinions of the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention (WGAD). Nabeel Rajab served two years in prison (2012-2014) for tweet-related offences, which the WGAD found to be arbitrary.⁶⁵ In 2012, the WGAD also found Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja's detention to be arbitrary and called for his immediate release.⁶⁶ The Government of Bahrain has ignored both decisions, and Al-Khawaja continues to serve a life-sentence.

Bahrain has also failed to engage with the Special Rapporteur on Torture, who has twice had planned visits to the country cancelled, the latest in 2013.⁶⁷ Amnesty International justifiably criticised Bahrain for the cancellation of the rapporteurs visit, calling its reform project "not serious" in response.⁶⁸ The Special Rapporteur has still not been invited back into Bahrain yet maintains his insistence on a country visit. The government has not yet agreed to allow him to carry out such a visit. Other UN procedures including the Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders⁶⁹, the Special Rapporteur on the Rights to Freedom of Assembly⁷⁰ and of Association, the Special Rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of the Right to Freedom of Opinion and Expression⁷¹ and the Working Group on Enforced and Involuntary Disappearance⁷² have also been waiting to enter the country. The government of Bahrain did however allow a visit from the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in 2014 on a limited technical mandate, consulting them in the formation of the National Human Rights Commission.⁷³ Though this is a positive step, it is stressed that Bahrain must engage with all UN mechanisms on their full mandate. The OHCHR's visit on a limited mandate to Bahrain must also be seen in the context of Bahrain's rejection of other UN human rights procedures.

⁶⁵ FIDH, *The UN finds the detention of Nabeel Rajab arbitrary, it is urgent to release him*, 27 November 2013, <https://www.fidh.org/en/north-africa-middle-east/bahrain/14301-the-un-finds-the-detention-of-nabeel-rajab-arbitrary-it-is-urgent-to>, (accessed 20 November 2014).

⁶⁶ *Abdulhadi Abdulla Alkhawaja v. Bahrain*, Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, Opinion No. 6/2012, U.N. Doc. A/HRC/WGAD/2012/6 (2012), 13 July 2012, <http://www1.umn.edu/humanrts/wgad/6-2012.html>, (accessed 20 November 2014).

⁶⁷ UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, *Bahrain / Human Rights: Government effectively cancels UN Special Rapporteur on torture's visit*, 24 April 2013, <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=13261&LangID=E>, (accessed 3 December 2014).

⁶⁸ Amnesty International, *Cancelled UN visit shows Bahrain 'not serious' about human rights*, 24 April 2013, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/news/cancelled-un-visit-shows-bahrain-not-serious-about-human-rights-2013-04-24>, (accessed 3 December 2014).

⁶⁹ OHCHR, *Situation of Human Rights Defenders – Country Visits*, <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/SRHRDefenders/Pages/CountryVisits.aspx> (accessed 4 December 2014)

⁷⁰ OHCHR, *Freedom of Assembly – Country Visits*, <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/AssemblyAssociation/Pages/CountryVisits.aspx> (accessed 4 December 2014)

⁷¹ OHCHR, *Freedom of Opinion and Expression – Country Visits*, <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/FreedomOpinion/Pages/Visits.aspx> (accessed 4 December 2014)

⁷² OHCHR, *Enforced and Involuntary Disappearance – Country Visits*, <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Disappearances/Pages/Visits.aspx> (accessed 4 December 2014)

⁷³ Toumi, H., *Bahrain reject UNHRC statement charges*, Gulf News, 11 June 2014.

Conclusion

It is demonstrable that even as late as December 2014, Bahrain still meets the criteria to be listed as a “Country of Concern”. The FAC has made it clear in their own 2014 report. The FAC’s November 2014 report found little or no evidence that any significant progress in Bahrain’s human rights record had occurred. By not listing it as a “Country of Concern”, and by actively avoiding any public criticism of its poor and unimproved human rights record, the FCO has failed to back real reform and effectively given the government of Bahrain space to continue its crackdown on political dissidents and human rights defenders.

Bahrain has failed to honestly implement the BICI’s recommendations. This is most clearly characterised by the absence of independence in the Ombudsman Office, Prisoners and Detainees Commission and National Institute for Human Rights, three organisations which cannot operate effectively without it. At the same time, the government of Bahrain lauds the establishment of these bodies as major accomplishments. The government of Bahrain has not seriously engaged with UN special procedures. In previous years Bahrain ignored the decisions of the WGAD and twice barred the entry of the Special Rapporteur on Torture, and in 2014 no effort has been made to work with the UN Human Rights Council. Finally, the renewed national dialogue in January 2014, which at the time was used as a reason why Britain should hold off from classifying Bahrain a “Country of Concern”, quickly proved to be a failure. The November 2014 elections have not been free nor fair and the lack of meaningful political reform is a mark of failure on the government of Bahrain.⁷⁴

On the basis of these arguments, and the deterioration of the human rights situation in Bahrain, BIRD calls on the FCO to implement the FAC’s recommendation and revise its decision not to list Bahrain as a “Country of Concern” in its latest Human Rights Report and reconsider Bahrain’s classification in its Human Rights Report 2015.

⁷⁴ See pp. 20-21.

Unconditional Support: FCO Public Statements

“It’s bizarre that in its recent Foreign Office report, the UK government said Bahrain’s reform programme suggested the country’s “overall trajectory on human rights will be positive”. There is simply no basis for such an upbeat assessment.”⁷⁵

David Mepham, UK Director, Human Rights Watch

Failing to list Bahrain as a “Country of Concern” in the FCO’s 2014 Human Rights Report was a strong indication of the UK government’s unwavering support for the government of Bahrain despite the deterioration of the human rights situation in the country and the FAC’s subsequent criticisms. Prior to the publication of their Human Rights Report in April 2013, the government’s approach to the situation remained largely unchanged. The FAC expressed well-founded concerns over the reputation that the UK had gained following its inconsistent approach to the situation in Bahrain. As a result, they warned that *“the UK must be extremely careful about the message it sends to the broader public in Bahrain and internationally as it positions itself as a ‘critical friend’ to Bahrain.”⁷⁶*

The FAC has previously criticised the government for similar inconsistency with regards to the Formula One race in Bahrain.⁷⁷ This inconsistency was evident in March 2014, when Baroness Warsi argued that the UK *“has not received any specific evidence of the use of torture to extract confessions [in Bahrain]”⁷⁸*. Her statement came as a response to questions posed in the House of Lords on the use of torture to extract confessions in Bahrain. Baroness Warsi’s reply is factually wrong and aroused criticism. In response to her statement, human rights organisation REDRESS wrote a letter on behalf of British-Bahraini torture victim Jaffer Hesabi expressing “shock, anger and sadness” at the statement.⁷⁹ The organisation argued that “there is no doubt” that Mr. Hesabi was tortured in Bahrain and that evidence of this was provided to the FCO in 2013 and expressed in open court.⁸⁰

Baroness Warsi’s statement, besides being incorrect, is inconsistent with the FCO’s own stance on the use of torture in Bahrain, including the use of torture to extract confessions. In 2013, the UK signed a joint-statement at the UN Human Rights Council urging Bahrain to cooperate with

⁷⁵ Mepham, D., *Britain’s Still Making Excuses for Bahrain*, Human Rights Watch, 2 June 2014, <http://www.hrw.org/news/2014/01/21/bahrain-prospects-reform-remain-dim> (accessed 27 November 2014).

⁷⁶ *FAC Report*, para. 31.

⁷⁷ See p. 6.

⁷⁸ Column WA130, Lords Hansard Text for 27 March 2014, Bahrain Questions, House of Lords, http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201314/ldhansrd/text/140327w0001.htm#w_a_st_6 (accessed 26 November 2014).

⁷⁹ Letter from REDRESS to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 10 April 2014, <http://www.redress.org/downloads/publications/10%20April%202014%20Letter%20to%20Baroness%20Warsi.pdf> (accessed 26 November 2014).

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

the Special Rapporteur on Torture, who has been prevented from entering Bahrain.⁸¹ The UK has also expressed concern over “allegations of torture” in its Human Rights and Democracy 2012 report and has claimed to be providing training to Bahrain’s police in order to reduce reliance on confessions to prevent torture.⁸²

The BICI report also proved the use of systematic torture in Bahrain for the purposes of extracting confessions later relied upon by courts for sentencing.⁸³ The FCO denied knowledge of this evidence, despite being aware of the BICI and its recommendations.

In its 2014 report, the FCO argued that the government of Bahrain’s judicial and security reform programmes suggest a positive human rights trajectory.⁸⁴ This discrepancy with international NGO reports, which have been much more critical, is discussed in the previous chapter. NGOs have expressly and severely criticised the UK government throughout 2014. Human Rights Watch (HRW) stated in June that “Britain is still making excuses in Bahrain” and that the UK response has been ineffective.⁸⁵

This backlash against the UK government was felt following Prince Andrew’s January 2014 visit to Bahrain at the request of the FCO. The visit coincided with an embassy-organised “Great British Week” in Bahrain to “*emphasise the friendship and strong bilateral relationship between the United Kingdom and Bahrain.*”⁸⁶ Nicholas McGeehan, Gulf Researcher at HRW, publicly criticised the visit the FCO response, arguing that it was giving room for Bahrain to arrest and torture their way to stability.⁸⁷ He also argued that unlike the United States, another key ally to

⁸¹ BIRD, *UN Human Rights Council Issue Joint-Statement on Bahrain at 26th Session*, 10 June 2014, <http://birdbh.org/2014/06/un-human-rights-council-issue-joint-statement-on-bahrain-at-26th-session/> (accessed 26 November 2014).

⁸² FCO, *Human Rights and Democracy Report 2012 - Bahrain*, 15 April 2013, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/human-rights-and-democracy-report-2012-bahrain> (accessed 26 November 2014)

⁸³ BICI, *BICI Report*, pp.432-81.

⁸⁴ FCO, *Country Case Study: Bahrain - Progress on Reform Implementation*, 2013 Human Rights and Democracy Report, 10 April 2014, <https://www.gov.uk/government/case-studies/country-case-study-bahrain-progress-on-reform-implementation> (accessed 26 November 2014).

⁸⁵ Mepham, D., *Britain’s Still Making Excuses for Bahrain*, Human Rights Watch, 2 June 2014, <http://www.hrw.org/news/2014/01/21/bahrain-prospects-reform-remain-dim>, (accessed 27 November 2014).

⁸⁶ Foreign and Commonwealth Office, *British Embassy in Bahrain Launches GREAT British Week 2014*, 6 November 2013, <https://www.gov.uk/government/world-location-news/british-embassy-in-bahrain-launches-great-british-week-2014>, (accessed 28 November 2014).

⁸⁷ McGeehan, N., *Dispatches: UK Awards Torture with Royal Visit*, Human Rights Watch, 16 January 2014, <http://www.hrw.org/news/2014/01/16/dispatches-uk-awards-torture-royal-visit>, (accessed 27 November 2014) “*Prince Andrew will arrive in a country whose rulers appear to believe that it is possible to arrest and torture their way to stability and security. And the Foreign Office appears to believe much the same – at least when it comes to Bahrain, whose people suffer the daily consequences of increasingly repressive laws aimed at quashing their calls for political reform and accountability for serious human rights violations. The British government’s approach to Bahrain clearly infers a double standard regarding support for human rights.*”

Bahrain, the UK has made “no explicit calls for the release of any of the hundreds of political prisoners.”⁸⁸

Other human rights activists have criticized UK action. Sarah Leah Whitson, Executive Director of the Middle East Division in HRW, has also been critical of the UK. She stated that the UK’s diplomacy in Bahrain has been hypocritical.⁸⁹ Jodie Ginsberg, CEO of Index on Censorship, expressed concern in an October 2014 statement that the UK government was doing very little to pressure Bahrain over its human rights record. She criticised their response and highlighted that instead of pushing Bahrain to respect their human rights obligations, the UK has instead praised the country’s ‘improvements’ in human rights despite clear evidence that these rights are in fact being violated.⁹⁰

In the year since the FAC report was published, Bahraini activists and human rights defenders have also shown growing distrust towards the British government, notably the FCO. Prominent Bahraini activist Nabeel Rajab stated in an interview with Vice News that, where activists once considered the US “as the worst government [in responding to the human rights situation in Bahrain]”, “today the British are the worst...the British government is totally against our movement. Their interests in our region has got nothing to do with principles.”⁹¹

Maryam Al-Khawaja, Director of Advocacy at the Gulf Center for Human Rights, was arrested by authorities in Bahrain last September as she attempted to visit her father Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja who was then on hunger strike.⁹² She has also been critical of the UK government response to Bahrain following the FAC report recommendations. Echoing Mr. Rajab’s sentiments, she stated, “while it’s easy to say that western countries have double standards on human rights violations in the Middle East and North Africa, the worst country of all in terms of foreign policy towards Bahrain is the UK.”⁹³

Criticism of the UK government’s double standards in Bahrain has not come from human rights organisations alone, but has also been voiced by MPs, writers and observers during events following the FAC report. In February 2014, 29 MPs signed an early day motion (EDM) arguing,

⁸⁸ McGeehan, N., *Britain Calls for Human Rights - Then Embraces a Bahraini Torture Suspect*, Vice News, 11 November 2014, <https://news.vice.com/article/britain-calls-for-human-rights-then-embraces-a-bahraini-torture-suspect>, (accessed 28 November 2014).

⁸⁹ Tweet by Sarah Leah Whitson, 19 January 2014, <https://twitter.com/sarahleah1/status/424940110870614016>, (accessed 27 November 2014).

⁹⁰ Knezevic, M., *Index Calls on UK to Speak Out on Bahraini Human Rights Abuses After Rajab Arrest*, Index on Censorship, 3 October 2014, <http://www.indexoncensorship.org/2014/10/bahrain-human-rights-defender-nabeel-rajab-jailed-tweets/>, (accessed 27 November 2014)

⁹¹ Vice News, *Bahrain: An Inconvenient Uprising (Extra Scene)*, 19 November 2014, <https://news.vice.com/video/bahrain-an-inconvenient-uprising-extra-scene>, (accessed 27 November 2014).

⁹² See p. 15.

⁹³ Wearing, D., *Britain and Bahrain: Still Allied Against Human Rights*, Open Democracy, 27 March 2014, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/arab-awakening/david-wearing/britain-and-bahrain-still-allied-against-democracy-and-human-rights>, (accessed 27 November 2014).

“progress has not been made” in Bahrain.⁹⁴ 70 MPs echoed this notion in EDM 213, which criticised the “failure” of the FCO in not listing Bahrain as a “Country of Concern”.⁹⁵

The FCO failed to call for the release of both Nabeel Rajab and Maryam Al-Khawaja, whose recent arrests in Bahrain prompted international condemnation by the United States,⁹⁶ the United Nations⁹⁷ and Norway⁹⁸. 61 Members of the European Parliament also called for Mr. Rajab’s release,⁹⁹ as did 13 UK MPs.¹⁰⁰ The FAC in 2014 used both cases, alongside the continued detention of Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja, as a basis for their assessment that Bahrain has failed to safeguard human rights¹⁰¹.

In the political sphere, the Crown Prince’s renewed effort to restart the National Dialogue at the start of this year was a short-lived failure. Despite this, Bahrain has gone ahead with parliamentary elections, which the opposition has boycotted. In the week leading up the election, the government launched a campaign promising priority jobs and services to voters, in effect incentivising elections.¹⁰² A penalties plan was also declared, which included restricted access to government jobs for non-voters.¹⁰³

The November 2014 elections were declared a success by Bahrain, and the UK joined in congratulating Bahrain’s elections, alongside Egypt and Saudi Arabia.¹⁰⁴ British Ambassador to

⁹⁴ Early Day Motion 1081 Human Rights in Bahrain (No. 2), 12 February 2014, <http://www.parliament.uk/edm/2013-14/1081>, (accessed 27 November 2014).

⁹⁵ Early Day Motion 213: Bahrain Justice System, 3 July 2014, <http://www.parliament.uk/edm/2014-15/213>, (accessed 28 November 2014).

⁹⁶ *US: We urge Bahrain to drop the charges on Nabeel Rajab*, U.S. State Department Daily Press Briefing, 16 October 2014, Youtube mirror uploaded 20 October 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ynbJMP9rxDM&>, (accessed 28 November 2014).

⁹⁷ Amnesty International, *Bahrain: Release activist facing three years in jail for ‘insulting’ tweets*, 27 October 2014, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/news/bahrain-release-activist-facing-three-years-jail-insulting-tweets-2014-10-27>, (accessed 28 November 2014).

⁹⁸ Utenriks Departementet, *Norge bekymret over arrestasjon av menneskerettighetsforkjemper i Bahrain*, 14 October 2014, http://www.regjeringen.no/nb/dep/ud/aktuelt/nyheter/2014/mr_forkjempere_bahrain.html?id=771739, (accessed 28 November 2014).

⁹⁹ International Federation for Human Rights, *MEPs call for the release of Nabeel Rajab*, 28 October 2014, <https://www.fidh.org/en/north-africa-middle-east/bahrain/16351-meps-call-for-the-release-of-nabeel-rajab>, (accessed 28 November 2014).

¹⁰⁰ BIRD, *UK Members of Parliament Urge the Release of Nabeel Rajab*, 29 October 2014, <http://birdbh.org/2014/10/uk-members-of-parliament-urge-the-release-of-nabeel-rajab/>, (accessed 28 November 2014).

¹⁰¹ FAC, *The FCO’s Human Rights Work in 2013*, Commons Select Committee, 27 November 2014, <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201415/cmselect/cmcaff/551/55104.htm> (accessed 4 December 2014) para. 13.

¹⁰² Alayam, *AlAyam front page*, 20 November 2014, <http://www.alayam.com/upload/issue/2014/9356/pdf/01.pdf>, (accessed 20 November 2014).

¹⁰³ Gulf Daily News, *Penalties plan for not voting*, 21 November 2014, <http://gulf-daily-news.com/NewsDetails.aspx?storyid=390418>, (accessed 21 November 2014).

¹⁰⁴ Daily News Egypt, *Egypt welcomes “great success” of Bahrain elections*, 24 November 2014, <http://www.dailynewsegypt.com/2014/11/24/egypt-welcomes-great-success-bahrain-elections/>, (accessed 27 November 2014). Kuwait News Agency, *Saudi Arabia congratulates Bahrain for electoral success*, 24

Bahrain reported a ‘good electoral atmosphere’¹⁰⁵ and Afzal Khan MEP, who unofficially observed the elections, enthusiastically congratulated Bahrain, criticised the opposition boycott for ‘derailing democracy’ and argues it was a ‘duty’ Bahraini citizens.¹⁰⁶ Journalist Brian Whitaker criticised this as a “British stamp of approval” on an election which was at best flawed.¹⁰⁷

International media and local NGOs were much less optimistic over the elections in their coverage as opposed to the governments. The opposition boycott overshadowed the election in many outlets’ coverage,¹⁰⁸ and one news report succinctly described the confusion surrounding the election when it noted that only 5 candidates were elected in the first round of elections, while one secured his seat by acclamation. The remaining seats were contested again in reruns.¹⁰⁹ Research and advocacy organisation Bahrain Watch highlighted a number of flaws and controversies surrounding these elections. When the UK Ambassador to Bahrain praised those elections, Bahrain Watch found that some of Bahrain’s electoral flaws would have violated the UK’s own Electoral Commission Guidelines. This includes a non-independent electoral management body overseeing the elections, the absence of voter registration scrutiny, state influence on candidates and voters, and the lack of universal and equal suffrage through the gerrymandering of election districts.¹¹⁰

Such misrepresentations by the UK have led not just to growing criticism, but direct accusations that the UK is complicit in violations of human rights in Bahrain. HRW’s Nicholas McGeehan argued that “*Bahrain’s western allies [UK, US, EU] bear significant responsibility for the worsening situation in Bahrain and for the calamitous circumstances facing activists in the country*”¹¹¹ whilst Al-Khawaja claimed that “*the United Kingdom’s silence places it in danger of*

November 2014, <http://www.kuna.net.kw/ArticleDetails.aspx?id=2410473&Language=en>, (accessed 27 November 2014).

¹⁰⁵ Al-Bab, *Britain’s strange love affair with Bahrain*, 23 November 2014, <http://www.al-bab.com/blog/2014/november/britain-bahrain-love-affair.htm#sthash.enML0u5Z.XuSupd89.dpbs>, (accessed 27 November 2014).

¹⁰⁶ Tweet by Afzal Khan MEP, 23 November 2014, <https://twitter.com/akhanmep/status/536610655223042048>, (accessed 27 November 2014).

¹⁰⁷ Whitaker, B., *Britain’s Strange Love Affair with Bahrain*, Al-Bab, 23 November 2014, <http://www.al-bab.com/blog/2014/november/britain-bahrain-love-affair.htm#sthash.enML0u5Z.B6NJB6Yv.dpbs>, (accessed 28 November 2014)

¹⁰⁸ Economist, *Slim pickings*, 21 November 2014, <http://www.economist.com/news/middle-east-and-africa/21633628-opposition-boycotting-parliamentary-polls-slim-pickings>, (accessed 27 November 2014). Al Jazeera English, *Bahrain election: What’s behind the boycott?* Al Jazeera English, <http://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/insidestory/2014/11/bahrain-election-what-behind-boycott-2014112117183646745.html>, (accessed 27 November 2014).

¹⁰⁹ Middle East Monitor, *Bahrain: What Now?* Middle East Monitor, 24 November 2014, <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/articles/middle-east/15437-bahrain-what-now>, (accessed 27 November 2014).

¹¹⁰ Bahrain Watch, *Between Ballots and Boycotts: Bahrain’s Political and Electoral System’s Assessed*, 26 November 2014 <https://bahrainwatch.org/blog/2014/11/26/between-the-ballots-and-boycotts-bahrains-political-and-electoral-systems-assessed/> (accessed 28 November 2014)

¹¹¹ McGeehan, N., *Dispatches: Time to Stand up for Bahrain’s Dissidents*, Human Rights Watch, 1 September 2014, <http://www.hrw.org/news/2014/09/01/dispatches-time-stand-bahrain-s-dissidents>, (accessed 27 November 2014).

being seen as complicit in Bahrain's human rights abuses".¹¹² She further compared Britain's relationship to Bahrain to Russia's supportive relation with Syria.¹¹³

Despite some small advancement, the net result of Bahrain's reforms in the past few years has hemmed towards dictatorship, not democracy. The government of Bahrain has adopted increasingly paranoid stances against political and human rights actors. In 2012, the government revoked the citizenship of 31 Bahrainis in one day.¹¹⁴ The number of revoked citizenships is now as high as 52. Before 2012, only 2 individuals had their citizenship revoked in Bahraini history. A slew of vaguely worded anti-terror laws introduced in 2013 have outlawed political protests in the capital Manama, banned members of the opposition from meeting with embassies in private, and greatly increased the powers of the state security forces.¹¹⁵

A new law against insulting the King has also been used to suppress on political expression. One activist, Zainab Al Khawaja, is facing up to 7 years in prison for tearing up a photo of the King. Tobias Ellwood, Middle East Minister, has stated that the Ambassador to Bahrain has "*emphasised the importance of ensuring that due legal process is respected and international norms of justice adhered to.*"¹¹⁶ Yet, such statements ignore that acts of libel or defamation, which Ms. Al-Khawaja's act may be argued to be, are generally considered to be civil offences, and not criminal as they are in Bahrain.

Conclusion

Bahrain's criminal law is draconian. What passes for due legal process in Bahrain's judicial system does not stand up to international standards. Yet British responses to Bahrain's human rights situation do not seem to reflect these concerns. This is part of the overarching issue of condemnation of the British stance towards Bahrain, and must be re-assessed by the FCO.

This growing criticism faced by the UK government indicates that it has not followed the FAC's recommendations to be careful over the message it sends regarding the human rights situation in Bahrain. BIRD calls on the FCO to revise its public policy towards Bahrain in recognition of the fact that the 'business as usual' tone of the current British-Bahraini relationship is often viewed as implicitly condoning or whitewashing the failures of the Bahraini government to successfully implement fruitful reforms.

¹¹² Al-Khawaja, M., *Bahrain is Britain's Shame*, Index on Censorship, 2 February 2013, <http://www.indexoncensorship.org/2013/02/bahrain-is-britains-shame/>, (accessed 27 November 2014).

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴ HRW, *Bahrain: Don't Arbitrarily Revoke Citizenship*, 8 November 2012, <http://www.hrw.org/news/2012/11/08/bahrain-don-t-arbitrarily-revoke-citizenship>, (accessed 2 December 2013).

¹¹⁵ Bahrain National Agency, *Recommendations of the Extraordinary Session of the National Assembly*, 28 July 2013, <http://www.bna.bh/portal/en/news/573207>, (accessed 2 December 2014).

¹¹⁶ Hansard, HC Deb, 1 December 2014, cW, <http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2014-11-24/215740/>, (accessed 2 November 2014).

Defence Relations

*“Both the government and the opposition in Bahrain view UK defence sales as a signal of British support for the government. The UK Government should take this into account when considering high-profile sales, such as the Eurofighter Typhoon, to Bahrain.”*¹¹⁷

Foreign Affairs Committee, 2014

The FAC highlighted concerns for *“the UK’s credibility if it allows itself to be associated with the problems in Bahrain rather than solutions.”*¹¹⁸ The arms sales branch of the British-Bahraini relationship is perhaps the most contentious and the most likely to draw criticism against and a damaging opinion of the UK. For this reason the FAC report paid significant attention to British arm sales.¹¹⁹ It stresses that Bahrainis, both within the government and in the opposition, view sales as a ‘signal of British support for the government’,¹²⁰ and that the British government must take this into account when considering such high-profile sales.

The Committee on Armed Export Controls (CAEC) has listed Bahrain as a “Country of Concern” already.¹²¹ Its concerns were that some sales, particular in small arms, rifles and hand grenades (among others) might be used in internal repression.¹²² The government refuted this, and Defence Secretary Michael Fallon has stated, *‘Since February 2011, we have approved a number of licences for the Bahrain air force, navy and defence force where we have been satisfied that there is no clear risk of items being used in human rights abuses or internal repression.’*¹²³

The UK has continued to sell arms to Bahrain that is unlikely to be used in human rights abuses since 2011. However, concerns remain over the symbolic value of these military sales and other areas in Bahrain’s defence relations with Britain. The FAC noted that Bahrainis, from across the political spectrum see arms sales as a show of support for the current government.¹²⁴

¹¹⁷ Para 180, Foreign Affairs Committee (FAC), *‘The UK’s relations with Saudi Arabia and Bahrain,’* Commons Select Committee, 19 September 2012, <http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/foreign-affairs-committee/news/uk-relations-with-saudi-arabia-and-bahrain/>, (accessed 24 November 2014)

¹¹⁸ *FAC Report*, para. 210.

¹¹⁹ *FAC Report*, paras. 180-1, 192-4.

¹²⁰ *FAC Report*, para. 181.

¹²¹ ‘MPs call for tightening over arms export for external repression,’ Parliament, 23 July 2014, <http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/other-committees/committee-on-arms-export-controls/news/report-arms-export-and-controls-2014/>, (accessed 26 November 2014).

¹²² ‘Scrutiny of Arms Exports and Arms Controls,’ CAEC, 2014, <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201415/cmselect/cmquad/186/186i.pdf>, (accessed 26 November 2014), para. 159.

¹²³ ‘Arms exports to countries of concern,’ Parliament, <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201415/cmselect/cmquad/186/186ii13.htm#a86>, (accessed 26 November 2014).

¹²⁴ Para 180, Foreign Affairs Committee (FAC), *‘The UK’s relations with Saudi Arabia and Bahrain,’* Commons Select Committee, 19 September 2012,

Indeed, some aspects of the British-Bahraini defence relationship have been very high profile and negatively received. Since 2012, Britain has sold at least £23,815,000 worth of arms to Bahrain.¹²⁵ Britain signed a new defence accord with Bahrain in 2012, the details of which are confidential.¹²⁶ In 2013, the Royal Military Sandhurst Academy renamed the Mons Hall, named after the World War I battle where thousands were killed, to the King Hamad Hall, after the Bahrain King donated £3 Million to the hall's renovation.¹²⁷ The Bahraini royal family and military regularly meet with British officials, including meetings at Downing Street with the Prime Minister to discuss on-going Typhoon jet sales negotiations, reportedly worth £1 billion.¹²⁸

Prince Nasser bin Hamad Al-Khalifa, son of the king and commander of the Royal Guard, regularly conducts visits to the UK on military-related business.¹²⁹ Yet there stand credible allegations that he committed acts of torture, and the UK's High Court quashed his immunity from prosecution for these charges in October 2014.¹³⁰ The UK is party to the UN Convention Against Torture, article 6 of which stipulates prosecution of any person alleged to have committed torture in any place.¹³¹ It is not the purpose of this report to debate whether or not Prince Nasser deserves prosecution; however, as long as torture allegations surround him, and until such time as he goes to court and his innocence or guilt is decided upon, it is of extreme concern that UK officials continue conducting business with him.

Case Studies

The following two case studies of South Korean-Bahrain and U.S.-Bahrain defence relations should be considered by the FCO as ways in which human rights and the arms trade influence each other.

In 2013, the Stop the Shipment campaign, through a joint-effort by Bahraini, South Korean and international human rights organisations, successfully saw the cancellation of the sale of 3

<http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/foreign-affairs-committee/news/uk-relations-with-saudi-arabia-and-bahrain/>, (accessed 24 November 2014)

¹²⁵ 'UK Arms Exports Licenses,' Campaign Against Arms Trade, https://www.caat.org.uk/resources/export-licences/licence?rating=Military&iso2=BH&date_from=2012-01&date_to=2014-06, (accessed 26 November 2014).

¹²⁶ BNA, *Bahrain and UK Sign Defence Cooperation Agreement*, <http://www.bna.bh/portal/en/news/528759>, (accessed 4 December 2014).

¹²⁷ 'Row over renaming of Sandhurst hall after Bahrain donation,' Telegraph, 17 February 2013, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/defence/9875995/Row-over-renaming-of-Sandhurst-hall-after-Bahrain-donation.html>, (accessed 26 November 2014).

¹²⁸ 'Written submission from Bahrain Watch,' Parliament, <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201415/cmselect/cmquad/186/186iii07.htm#a8>, (accessed 26 November 2014), paras. 19, 33.

¹²⁹ *Ibid*, paras. 29, 32.

¹³⁰ 'Prince Nasser of Bahrain torture ruling quashed by High Court,' Telegraph, 7 October 2014, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/crime/11145650/Prince-Nasser-of-Bahrain-torture-ruling-quashed-by-High-Court.html>, (accessed 26 November 2014).

¹³¹ Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT), adopted December 10, 1984, art. 6.

million tear gas canisters from South Korea to Bahrain.¹³² Sarah Waldron, Core Campaign Coordinator at the Campaign Against Arms Trade, stated, “*Any government which supports arms sales to Bahrain is also offering moral and practical support to an authoritarian regime that is abusing its own citizens.*”¹³³

Brian Wood, Amnesty International’s Head of Arms Control and Human Rights, stated, “*South Korea is sending a clear message that the Bahraini authorities’ ongoing repression of peaceful protests is unacceptable and will not be rewarded with future weapons transfers.*”¹³⁴

More recent is the U.S. decision to withhold some arms sales to Bahrain after Tom Malinowski, Assistant Secretary of State for Human Rights, was expelled from the country.¹³⁵ The U.S. use of military sales as an incentive to cooperating with its human rights agenda has proven extremely effective, and Malinowski re-entered Bahrain in the first week of December. The U.S. is due to review its arms exports after Malinowski’s second visit.¹³⁶

Though Britain has maintained that it does not sell arms that are likely to contribute to internal repression following a 2011 review, nevertheless the FCO should consider the South Korean and U.S. precedents. The U.S. precedent in particular shows how defence relations and human rights may be balanced. The FCO might consider withdrawing arms licenses in a similar method to promote human rights reforms in Bahrain.

Conclusion

BIRD acknowledges the long-standing friendship and alliance between Britain and Bahrain, and most recently the two countries’ role in the coalition against the terrorist group ISIS. BIRD further recognises that defence agreements between the two countries need to be carefully balanced with respect both to the internal situation in Bahrain and the external situation in the Middle East. But, as noted above, the FAC concluded that British relations with Bahrain should not be unconditional.

As members of the Bahraini forces, particularly Prince Nasser, have been allegedly involved in the torture of political protesters, Britain should be more critical of its ally. High-profile sales such as the Typhoon jet and the friendly relationship with the Bahraini royal family exhibit support for the Bahraini government and are not being balanced by a critical stance on the human rights situation.¹³⁷

¹³² Bahrain Watch, *Shipment Stopped*, 7 January 2014, (<https://bahrainwatch.org/blog/2014/01/07/south-korea-halts-massive-tear-gas-shipment-to-bahrain/>), (accessed 24 November 2014).

¹³³ *Ibid.*

¹³⁴ Amnesty International, *South Korea’s suspension of tear gas shipments to Bahrain welcomed*, 7 January 2014, (<http://www.amnesty.org.uk/press-releases/south-koreas-suspension-tear-gas-shipments-bahrain-welcomed>), (accessed 28 November 2014).

¹³⁵ See p. 16.

¹³⁶ Gordon, M., *Top American Human Rights Official to Return to Bahrain*, New York Times, 2 December 2014, (<http://www.nytimes.com/2014/12/03/world/middleeast/bahrain-us-human-rights-official-tom-malinowski.html>), (accessed 2 December 2014).

¹³⁷ *FAC report*, para. 181.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The FAC recommended that if there is no significant progress in Bahrain's implementation of the BICI reforms, no serious engagement in political dialogue and if Bahrain fails to engage with UN mechanisms, then the FCO should designate it as a "Country of Concern" in its 2014 Human Rights Report. The FAC made clear its concern that the UK could be perceived as a supporter of human rights abuses in Bahrain and stated that the UK's relationship should not be unconditional in the face of internal violations in the country.

The FCO failed to designate Bahrain as a "Country of Concern" in 2014 despite overwhelming evidence that there was no significant progress in any of the three areas identified, these being progress in the implementation of the BICI recommendations, political reform through a national dialogue and engagement with the UN. As BIRD finds that the situation in Bahrain has further deteriorated since the publishing of the FCO's 2014 Human Rights Report, it strongly suggests that the country be designated a "Country of Concern" in the 2015 Human Rights Report.

Statements made by the UK regarding the human rights situation in Bahrain have largely been negligent. BIRD sees a deterioration of the UK government's public image following the numerous FCO statements that have praised non-existing human rights improvements in the country. BIRD finds that in many cases, the UK has failed to condemn abuses by the government of Bahrain, and at other times has praised the government at the same time that other states and non-governmental organisations have criticised Bahrain. The UK has played a role in misleading the international community by overstating relatively scarce achievements and neglecting grave violations of human rights. There are even instances when local Bahraini activists have accused the UK of acting as a public relations firm on behalf of the government of Bahrain.

As a result, the FCO has failed to live up to the FAC's recommendations that the government monitor its policy closely and to be "extremely careful" of the message it sends to the broader public.

The following recommendations are made on the basis of the FAC's recommendations and BIRD's findings that Bahrain has failed to develop significantly in all the three key areas listed above.

To the Foreign and Commonwealth Office:

- To impose practical and public pressure on Bahrain to implement the BICI quickly and effectively;
- to take an openly critical stance towards Bahrain in its capacity as a "critical friend";
- to designate Bahrain as a "Country of Concern" in its 2015 Human Rights Report;

- to review its defence relations and reassess British arms sales to Bahrain together with the Ministry of Defence;
- to press upon Bahrain to allow visits by the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture, the Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders, the Special Rapporteur on the Freedom of Opinion and Expression and the UN Working Group on Enforced and Involuntary Disappearance;
- to press upon Bahrain to engage with UN mechanisms, particularly the Human Rights Committee and Committee Against Torture;
- and to stop meeting with all individuals accused of severe violations of international human rights conventions unless proven innocent by an independent and impartial court.

To Members of Parliament:

- To press upon the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to pursue its policies with a human rights agenda;
- and to press upon the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to list Bahrain as a “Country of Concern” in their 2015 Human Rights Report.