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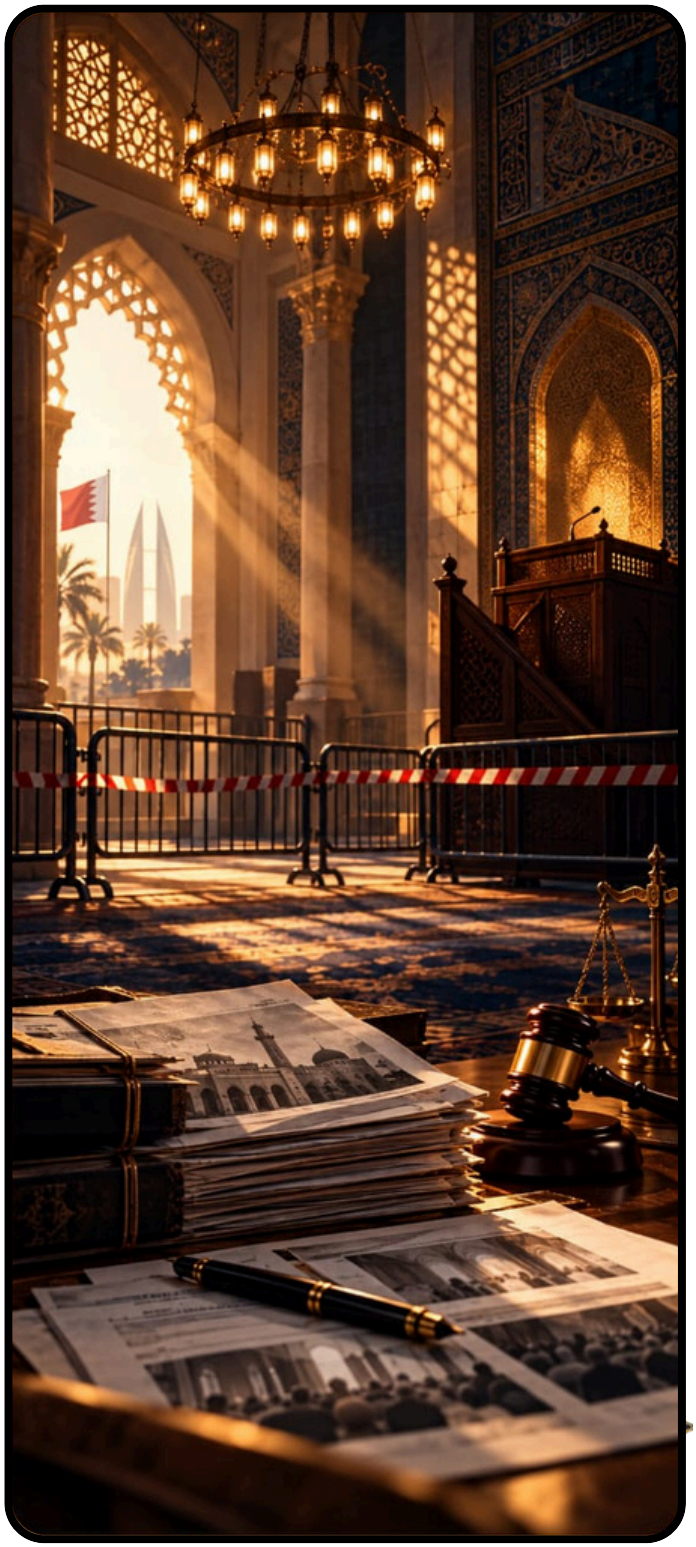
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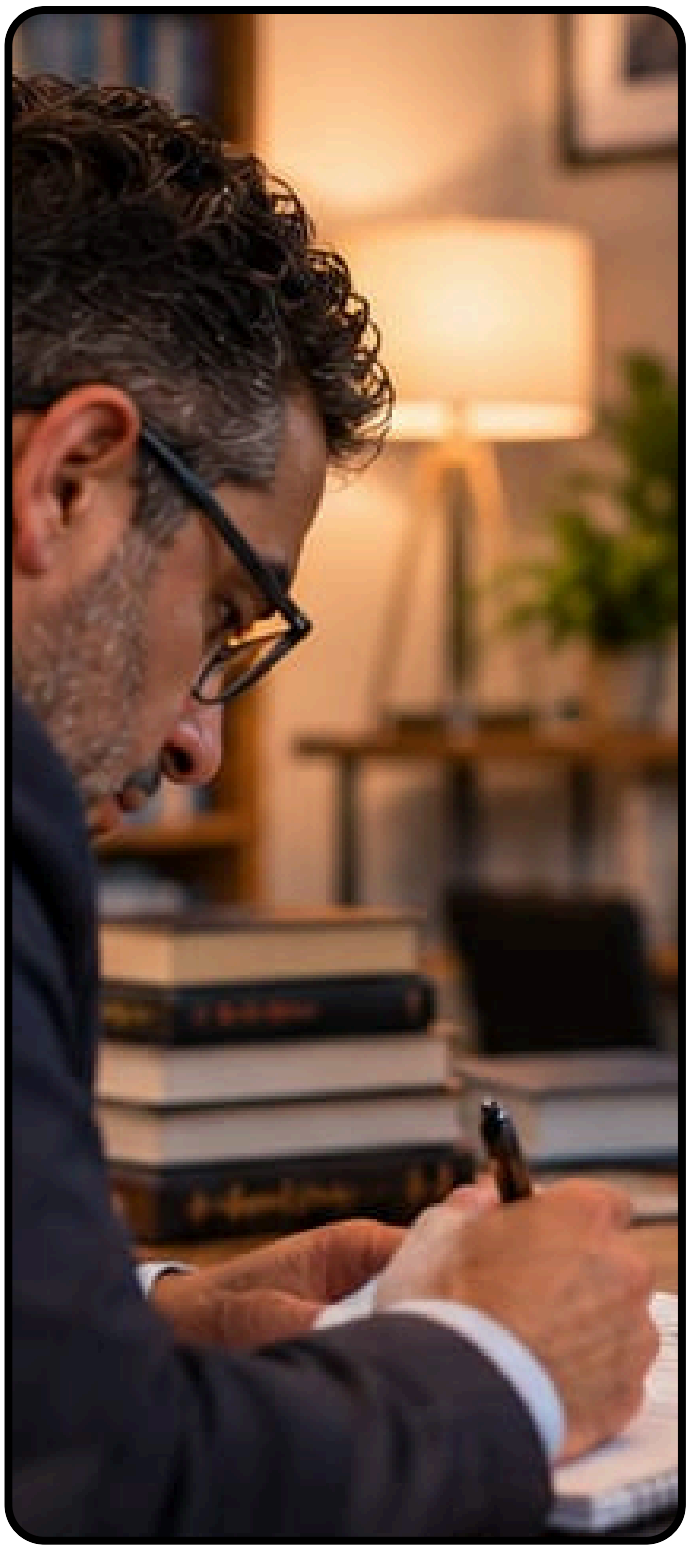
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Who Is Putting Whom on Trial in Bahrain?

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Who should be standing trial in Bahrain today? The religious scholars who have devoted their lives to teaching, preaching, serving their communities, and preserving Islamic unity and social coexistence? Or the authorities who pursue them on terrorism charges, while testimonies of torture and coercion continue to emerge, contradictions in investigation records come to light, and courtroom doors remain closed to scrutiny and accountability?

This question is not an attempt to reverse the roles, but a moral condemnation of authorities who must answer for the suffering of those they detain before asking others to believe their accusations. What is happening to religious scholars in Bahrain reveals a harsh form of abuse of power. Men who have spent their lives teaching, providing religious guidance, and serving others are being put behind bars and subjected to accusations that damage their reputations and dignity, while their testimonies of torture, threats, humiliation, and coercion continue to emerge.

The consequences of this persecution have not been limited to depriving the scholars of their freedom. Its harsh effects have also reached their families, disrupting their lives and burdening them with fear and deprivation.

What kind of justice allows the prosecution to control the documents and evidence while the defence struggles to gain access to the very material it is supposed to examine and challenge? And what value does a confession have when the person who supposedly made it cannot be certain that what was recorded in their name is what they actually said?

More alarming than these irregularities, however, is that the trials of religious scholars appear, in their broader context, to be more than the prosecution of specific individuals. They reveal the true nature of a new project aimed at unlawfully asserting control over Shia religious life in Bahrain and criminalising activities that have been an integral part of the community's life and identity for decades.

Khums, collected in accordance with Islamic religious rulings, is presented by the prosecution as suspicious financing. Religious seminaries that educate students in Islamic studies are portrayed as recruitment institutions, while religious pulpits addressing matters of faith and society become grounds for accusations and incitement. It is as though the authorities want to allow only religious activities they approve of and permit scholars to express only views that align with their wishes.

This course of action cannot be understood in isolation from the long history of tensions between the authorities and the Shia community in Bahrain, or from attempts to interfere in religious institutions, endowments, and rituals. The issue is not simply what verdicts the court may deliver, but also the potential consequences for the relationship between the state and an integral part of Bahraini society. It risks deepening the sense that the community's identity and institutions have become targets of policies aimed at subjugation and marginalisation.

When the daughter of Sayed Majeed al-Mishal, head of the Islamic Scholars Council, recounts her father's suffering following surgery and what he told her about threats, humiliation, and being forced to sign documents, and when the son of Sheikh Isa al-Mumin speaks of the days when his family had no news of his father and waited for their first visit, these are not merely emotional details added to the case. They are testimonies that confront the cold language of official investigation records with the human reality of the violations.

The gravest danger facing victims is not only the violation of their rights, but also being denied an effective means of holding those responsible accountable.

This brings us to the question at the heart of this issue of Rights Under Attack: Who investigates the investigators?

Who examines the credibility of investigation records? Who investigates complaints of torture? Who verifies the circumstances under which signatures and confessions were obtained? And who ensures that oversight institutions do not become a procedural shield protecting officials instead of delivering justice to victims?

Justice cannot prevail when those responsible for investigations are themselves beyond investigation. Nor do trials acquire legitimacy merely because hearings are held and verdicts are issued. A fair judiciary is not measured by its ability to convict defendants, but by its ability to protect their rights, expose abuses, and hold those in power accountable when they misuse their authority.

The case of the religious scholars is not isolated from the broader human rights situation in Bahrain. In this issue, we also shed light on the revocation of citizenship affecting 69 people, including 26 children, according to a joint human rights report. This case reveals another dimension of suffering, in which national identity itself becomes vulnerable to deprivation and individuals find that their right to belong to their homeland can be taken away by a decision of the authorities.

From imprisonment to citizenship revocation, and from restrictions on freedom of religion and belief to interference with religious institutions, violations take many forms. Yet they share a common feature: the expansion of state power at the expense of the very rights it is supposed to protect.

We do not stand halfway between victims and those who violate their rights. Our position is firmly on the side of individuals when their freedom is taken away, detainees when their dignity is violated, families when they are punished for acts they did not commit, and communities when their right to preserve their identity and religious institutions is targeted.

That is why demands for justice for the religious scholars, independent investigations into reported violations, full protection of the defence's rights, and the release of everyone arbitrarily detained are fundamental to human rights work.

The authorities may be able to close courtroom doors, control what is published about hearings, and impose their narrative through the media, but they cannot conceal the truth.

The second issue of the Rights Under Attack bulletin examines repression and human rights violations in Bahrain, focusing on the trials of religious scholars and the accompanying testimonies of torture, coercion, humiliation, and the lack of safeguards to ensure justice. It also revisits the record of secret trials and impunity, confronting the authorities with their moral and human rights responsibilities for the suffering of victims.

This issue features painful testimonies from the families of detained religious scholars, revealing the fear, deprivation, deteriorating health, property confiscations, and frozen bank accounts resulting from the arrests. Through the press conference "Behind Closed Doors," the voices of families come to the forefront, exposing the harshness of measures whose consequences have extended beyond depriving religious scholars of their freedom to affecting their children and families.

The issue also examines the targeting of the independence of Shia religious institutions, interference in religious endowments, and the implications of the scholars' trials for relations between the state and society. It also documents the revocation of citizenship of 69 people, including 26 children. These cases reveal the many forms that violations can take and affirm that the failure of institutions to deliver justice to victims and hold those responsible accountable is no less dangerous than the continuation of injustice itself.

While the authorities may control the courts and prisons, victims possess a right that cannot be taken away: the right to have the truth told, to have their voices heard, and to ensure that those responsible for attacking their rights remain subject to scrutiny and accountability, no matter how much time passes.

The Editorial Board

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From Torture-Extracted Confessions to Statements Never Made:

Sheikh Mohammed Sanqour's Testimony Reopens Bahrain's Record of Coercion

Three Questions and Dozens of Pages in a Statement Attributed to Him: Two Decades of Testimonies Describe Signing Under Torture or Without Reading Interrogation Records

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Three Questions and Dozens of Pages in a Statement Attributed to Him: Two Decades of Testimonies Describe Signing Under Torture or Without Reading Interrogation Records

According to published accounts of his October 2026 court hearing, Sheikh Mohammed Sanqour, one of Bahrain's leading Shia religious scholars, said he had been asked only three questions by the Public Prosecution. Yet he later discovered an interrogation record spanning dozens of pages and containing questions he says were never put to him. His account brought renewed attention to one of the most painful chapters in Bahrain's human rights history: statements attributed to detainees who do not recall making them, and confessions that defendants say they were forced to sign without first reviewing their contents or under torture and threats.

The account attributed to Sheikh Sanqour went beyond challenging the integrity of the interrogation record. It also included his claim that he had been forced to stand blindfolded for an entire week and that his health had deteriorated as a result of this treatment.

The gravity of his testimony lies in the suspicion it raises about practices extending beyond the mere extraction of a signature: Can statements that an accused person never actually made be formally attributed to them? And who is responsible for verifying that an interrogation record accurately reflects what took place inside the interrogation room?

Since at least 2007, international and local human rights reports have documented repeated accounts from Bahraini detainees who said they were presented with documents they were not permitted to read or were forced to sign confessions after being subjected to beatings, suspension, electric shocks, and threats of sexual assault. More significantly, some of these cases were documented not only through victims' testimonies but also in official medical reports, court records, and a report issued by a commission of inquiry established by order of Bahrain's king.



In 2026, Coerced Statements Return to the Forefront of Court Proceedings

Sheikh Sanqour's complaint was not the first indication of a problem with the interrogation records in the ongoing case.

On July 16, 2026, the Bahrain Forum for Human Rights (BFHR) published a detailed report titled "Second Trial Session of the Scholars—Between Defence Restrictions and Coerced Confessions." Drawing on accounts from lawyers and local sources, the report documented what it described as more than twenty patterns of violations against detained religious scholars since May of that year.

According to BFHR, these accounts included complaints of being coerced into signing interrogation records, torture and ill-treatment, threats of sexual assault and revocation of citizenship, as well as restrictions on communication with lawyers.

The report also noted that the case file comprised more than 5,000 pages and that the defense team had complained of not being allowed to obtain a complete copy. Instead, some lawyers were permitted to review the file inside the courthouse for no more than two hours.



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These details raise a fundamental legal question: How can a lawyer examine thousands of pages, compare the statements recorded in defendants' interrogation records with what they actually said, verify the authenticity of signatures, and identify any discrepancies between the interrogations and the evidence, when the time allowed is insufficient even to familiarize themselves with the case file? The issue becomes even more serious when the objection concerns whether the defendant actually made the statements recorded in those pages.

Sheikh Hani al-Banna's Testimony: Thousands of Documents and Signatures Obtained Under Coercion

In a subsequent report dated August 21, 2026, the Bahrain Forum for Human Rights reported that Sheikh Hani al-Banna had raised concerns in court about confession documents that the defendants had not been allowed to read. He also pointed to the fact that they had been coerced into signing thousands of documents.
The Forum also reported a request to preserve surveillance camera recordings that could help verify how long the defendants had remained inside the Public Prosecution building and the nature of the procedures to which they had been subjected.
This point is particularly significant because comparing the actual duration of an interrogation with the volume of statements attributed to a defendant could reveal inconsistencies requiring a clear judicial explanation. If a statement runs to dozens of pages, it is legitimate to ask how much time would have been needed to pose the questions, answer them, record the responses, read the statement, and verify its accuracy.

SALAM Organization: Accounts of Assaults and Religious Scholars Forced to Sign Confessions

On July 16, 2026, SALAM for Democracy and Human Rights published an urgent appeal titled "Under the Weight of Torture and Sectarian Contempt: Shia Religious Scholars Forced to Sign False Confessions in Bahrain."
The organization said that statements it had received indicated that several detained religious scholars had been subjected to beatings, sectarian insults, threats of sexual assault and revocation of citizenship, as well as coercion to sign interrogation records. It called for an independent investigation, accountability for those found responsible, and verification of the integrity of the procedures and evidence presented to the court.

A Record of Testimonies: Who Signed Without Reading?

1. Maytham Bader Jassim al-Sheikh – 2007: Signing After Returning from the Beating Room

Maytham Bader Jassim al-Sheikh was arrested on December 21, 2007, in connection with the events in Jidhafs. In his testimony to Human Rights Watch, he said he had been subjected to suspension, electric shocks, and beatings before being referred to the Public Prosecution. There, he was asked to sign a document without being allowed to read it.
When he attempted to speak about the torture, he said he was taken to another room and subjected to further beatings. He was then brought back to the interrogation office, where he signed the document. He said it contained false information and that he had signed it in the hope of avoiding further abuse.
Human Rights Watch did not rely solely on his account. It also reviewed a medical report issued by Ministry of Health doctors documenting injuries to his wrists and shoulder consistent with possible suspension by handcuffs.

2. Naji Ali Hassan Fateel – 2007: Request to Read the Document Denied

Prominent human rights activist Naji Fateel recounted that he had been subjected to beatings, electric shocks, and suspension during interrogation. He was then taken to an official's office and asked to sign a document. Fateel requested to read it first, but said his request was denied, and he signed it during the same meeting.
Human Rights Watch reviewed a medical report submitted to the court by doctors at Salmaniya Hospital, documenting injuries and pain that the doctors considered supportive of aspects of his account of suspension.

In this case, the objection does not concern whether a signature existed, but rather the detainee's lack of opportunity to know the contents of the document he signed.

3. Ahmed Jaafar Mohammed – 2007: A Statement Signed Under Pressure

Ahmed Jaafar Mohammed was arrested on December 28, 2007. He said he had been subjected to threats, beatings, and suspension during his detention. In his testimony to Human Rights Watch, he stated that he had signed a statement without reading it after feeling that he had no real alternative.
This case highlights how the absence of consent can arise from the conditions of detention and accumulated threats, even when physical abuse does not occur at the precise moment a signature is requested.

4. Sheikh Mohammed Habib al-Saffaf (al-Miqdad) – 2010: A Confession Withheld from the Person Who Signed It

During a court hearing on October 28, 2010, Sheikh Mohammed Habib al-Saffaf, known as al-Miqdad, said he had been subjected to electric shocks, beatings, suspension, sleep deprivation, and forced standing to the point of losing consciousness.
He stated that this treatment continued until he signed a confession whose contents the interrogator had not allowed him to review. Human Rights Watch reviewed his testimony, along with medical reports and photographs concerning his injuries.
This case bears similarities to the complaint attributed to Sheikh Sanqour in terms of forced standing, physical exhaustion, and challenges to the integrity of statements attributed to the detainee. However, a distinction remains between signing a document without reading it and disputing the accuracy of an interrogation record.

5. Dr. Abduljalil al-Singace – 2010: Three Interrogation Records Signed Without Reading

Dr. Abduljalil al-Singace, an academic and activist with a mobility impairment, reported that he had been subjected to beatings, threats, and sleep deprivation during detention, and was forced to stand despite needing two crutches.
He told the court that he had been compelled to sign three interrogation records without reading their contents.
A report by doctors affiliated with the Royal Medical Services documented an injury to his eardrum and partial hearing loss, findings that the human rights report considered consistent with aspects of his account of being beaten.
This case illustrates that the existence of a signature does not eliminate the need to investigate the circumstances under which it was obtained.

6. Al-Hurr Yusuf Mohammed al-Sumaykh – 2010: Signing a Statement He Had Not Read

Al-Hurr Yusuf Mohammed al-Sumaykh told the court that he had signed two statements, one of which he had not read, and that he had been suspended by his feet after refusing to confess.
Human Rights Watch reviewed a photograph showing an injury near his ankle, which it said was consistent with aspects of his account, along with medical documents related to the case.
Here again, the connection emerges between abuse during interrogation and written statements whose signing circumstances are challenged by the detainee.

7. A Detainee During the 2011 Events: A Forty-Page Confession Signed Without Reading

In one of the most notable testimonies, the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry documented the case of a detainee arrested on March 17, 2011.



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According to the account recorded in Appendix B, Case No. 54, the detainee said he had been subjected to beatings, threats, and humiliation before being forced to sign a confession of approximately forty pages without reading it.
Although his name was not published, the inclusion of his testimony in the Commission of Inquiry's report makes it part of the official record of the investigation into violations committed in 2011.
The case bears a direct resemblance to the issue raised by Sheikh Sanqour: a substantial volume of written statements accompanied by objections from the person to whom they are attributed concerning how they were produced or the accuracy of their attribution.

8. Journalist Nazeeha Saeed – 2011: Signing After Beatings and Humiliation

Bahraini journalist Nazeeha Saeed was summoned for questioning on May 22, 2011. She reported being subjected to beatings, humiliation, and electric shocks before being forced to sign a document without being allowed to read it.
The Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry documented her testimony in its final report.
It is important to distinguish this incident from the preceding cases: the report described what Nazeeha Saeed signed as a document, not necessarily a criminal confession.
What these cases share, however, is the allegation that a signature was obtained through coercion while the signatory was denied an opportunity to read the text.

9. Healthcare Workers – 2011: Confessions Under Threat

The 2011 trial of a group of Bahraini doctors and nurses prompted widespread international objections.
Amnesty International reported testimonies of torture, threats, and forced standing for prolonged periods, as well as allegations that some detainees had been compelled to sign false statements.
The healthcare workers also faced military trials that drew criticism concerning their right to legal representation and their ability to challenge the prosecution's evidence.
This case demonstrates that complaints of coerced confessions were not confined to religious scholars or political activists, but also involved healthcare professionals detained in connection with events in the country.

10. Faisal Mansour Eid Nasser – 2013: Signing While Blindfolded, Then Signing a Pre-Prepared Statement

Faisal Mansour Eid Nasser was arrested on March 9, 2013. According to the Bahrain Center for Human Rights, he said he had been subjected to beatings, forced standing, sleep deprivation, and threats of sexual assault.
He reported being forced to sign a statement while blindfolded, without knowing its contents.
On April 25 of the same year, he was taken for questioning again in connection with another case. He said he had been forced to sign a pre-prepared statement without being allowed to read it, under threats of beatings and rape.
This is one of the clearest cases in which a human rights organization documented two forms of coercion: signing without knowing the contents and signing a statement prepared in advance.

11. Ali al-Arab and Ahmed al-Malali – 2017: Confessions That Ended in Execution

In the case of Ali al-Arab and Ahmed al-Malali, who were arrested in February 2017, human rights organizations documented serious allegations of torture and coercion during interrogation.
According to accounts from family members, Ali al-Arab was forced to sign a confession while blindfolded, while information concerning Ahmed al-Malali included allegations that he had signed a confession without being given an opportunity to read it beforehand.
United Nations experts raised concerns about allegations of torture and fair trial guarantees in the case.
The case did not end with prison sentences. Both men were executed in July 2019.
This outcome illustrates that reliance on a confession whose voluntariness is challenged by the accused can have irreversible consequences.



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12. Ali al-Shuwaikh – 2018: A Confession Following His Return from Abroad

In a report on the pursuit of Bahraini dissidents abroad, the Gulf Institute for Democracy and Human Rights examined the case of Ali al-Shuwaikh, who was returned from the Netherlands to Bahrain in October 2018. According to the report, al-Shuwaikh was tortured following his return and forced to sign coerced confessions at the Terrorism Crimes Prosecution. This case extends such complaints to individuals returned from abroad, raising questions about protection against torture following extradition or deportation.

13. Mohammed Ramadan and Hussain Moosa – 2014–2020: Can One Defendant's Statements Become Evidence Against Another?

Mohammed Ramadan and Hussain Moosa faced death sentences in connection with a bombing case. Amnesty International stated that Hussain Moosa had been tortured and had made a confession implicating both himself and Mohammed Ramadan. Ramadan, meanwhile, denied the charges and said he had refused to sign a confession despite being subjected to ill-treatment.

The case prompted objections concerning the integrity of the evidence and the manner in which allegations of torture were investigated.

Despite judicial reconsideration of the case, both death sentences were upheld in 2020.

This case reveals an additional dimension of the problem: the consequences of a confession allegedly extracted under torture may not be limited to the person who made it, but may also extend to the conviction of others.



14. The "Death or Confession" Report – 2017: Allegations of Coerced Confessions Before Military Courts

The Bahrain Forum for Human Rights, SALAM for Democracy and Human Rights, the Gulf Institute for Democracy and Human Rights, and the Bahrain Center for Human Rights jointly published a report titled "Death or Confession."

The report documented alleged violations against civilians subjected to military judicial proceedings, including Mohammed al-Mutaghawi and Sayed Alawi Hussein. It included allegations of confessions extracted under torture and denial of fundamental fair trial guarantees.

The significance of this joint report lies in the fact that it did not focus on a single incident of coerced signing, but examined the relationship between coercion, judicial proceedings, and the reliance on defendants' statements as evidence.

Third: What Did Bahrain's Own Official Investigation Establish?

This human rights record cannot be examined without referring to the report of the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry (BICI), published in November 2011. The Commission received hundreds of complaints concerning ill-treatment during detention, its medical experts examined selected cases, and it concluded that patterns of torture and physical and psychological abuse had occurred.

Among the methods of ill-treatment documented in the report were suspension, blindfolding, beatings, electric shocks, sleep deprivation, and forced standing for prolonged periods. The report also examined, particularly in sections addressing interrogations and the extraction of confessions, testimonies from detainees who had been forced to sign documents without being given an opportunity to read them.

In its concluding findings, the Commission reported that physical and psychological ill-treatment had been used to extract confessions or information, and that statements obtained under coercion had been introduced into judicial proceedings.

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This reveals a fundamental paradox: an official investigation acknowledged the existence of patterns of coerced confessions in 2011, yet human rights organizations continued to document similar allegations in subsequent years.

The United Nations: Repeated Warnings That Have Not Ceased

2017: Committee Against Torture Warns About Coerced Confessions

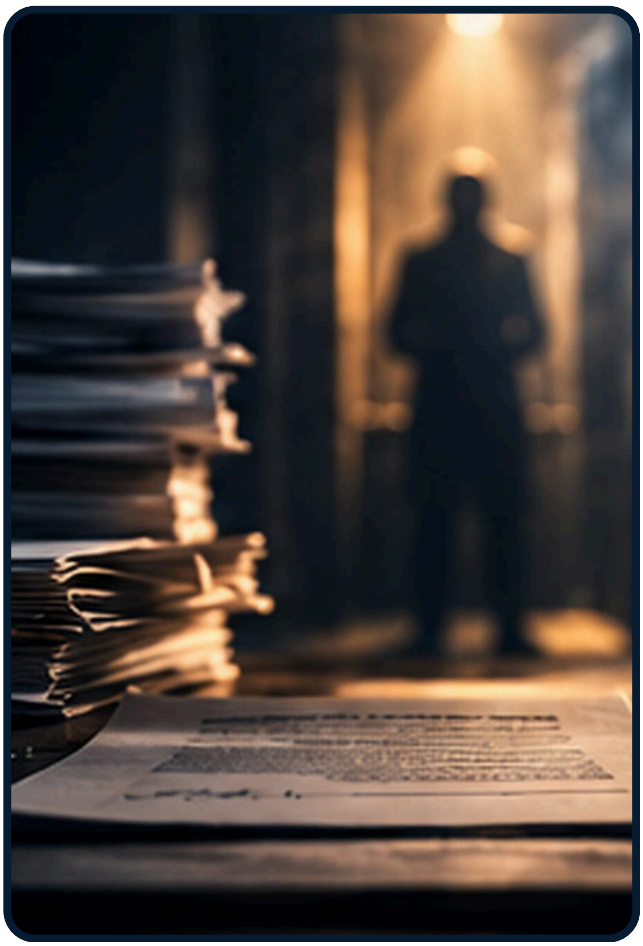
In its concluding observations issued on May 29, 2017, the United Nations Committee Against Torture expressed concern over continuing, numerous and consistent allegations of widespread torture and ill-treatment in Bahraini detention facilities, particularly during interrogations, for the purpose of extracting confessions or punishing detainees.
The Committee also criticized the gap between the legislation and institutions established following the Commission of Inquiry's report and the practical implementation of safeguards.
It also addressed military trials, some of which it said had relied on confessions extracted under coercion, and called for a review of convictions in cases where fair trial guarantees had not been respected.

2026: A More Recent and More Explicit UN Warning

On January 19, 2026, the United Nations published the Committee Against Torture's concluding observations on Bahrain's fourth periodic report, which had been adopted in November 2025.
In paragraph 35, the Committee expressed concern over reports indicating the repeated use of torture to extract confessions, the use of those confessions before courts to establish guilt, and the failure to investigate defendants' complaints concerning the circumstances in which the confessions had been obtained.



More importantly, in paragraph 36, the Committee called on Bahrain to exclude all statements obtained through torture or ill-treatment from evidence and to conduct prompt, independent investigations into such allegations.
The Committee emphasized a particularly important principle: the burden of proving that a confession was made voluntarily rests with the state authorities.
This means that a defendant who alleges coercion should not be left alone to prove what occurred in a place under the control of official authorities.
Rather, as recommended by the Committee, the authorities must provide evidence demonstrating the integrity of interrogation procedures and the voluntary nature of the statements.
In this context, interrogation recordings, entry and exit logs, medical examinations, the presence of legal counsel, and records of questions and answers become essential means of establishing the truth.



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How Does a Document Become an Instrument of Coercion?

A comparison of these testimonies, despite the differences in their dates and the varying strength of the available evidence in each case, reveals several recurring patterns.

1. Torture Does Not Necessarily End with the Extraction of a Statement

The testimonies of Maytham al-Sheikh, human rights activist Naji Fateel, Sheikh Mohammed Habib al-Miqdad, and Dr. Abduljalil al-Singace indicate that the harsh treatment they described was not merely punishment unrelated to the interrogation process. Rather, they said it preceded demands that they sign statements or confessions.
According to these accounts, pain, sleep deprivation, forced standing, and threats become means of compelling individuals to comply, even when they do not agree with the written contents.
It is this connection between abuse and signing that makes examining the voluntariness of a statement a legal necessity rather than a mere formality.

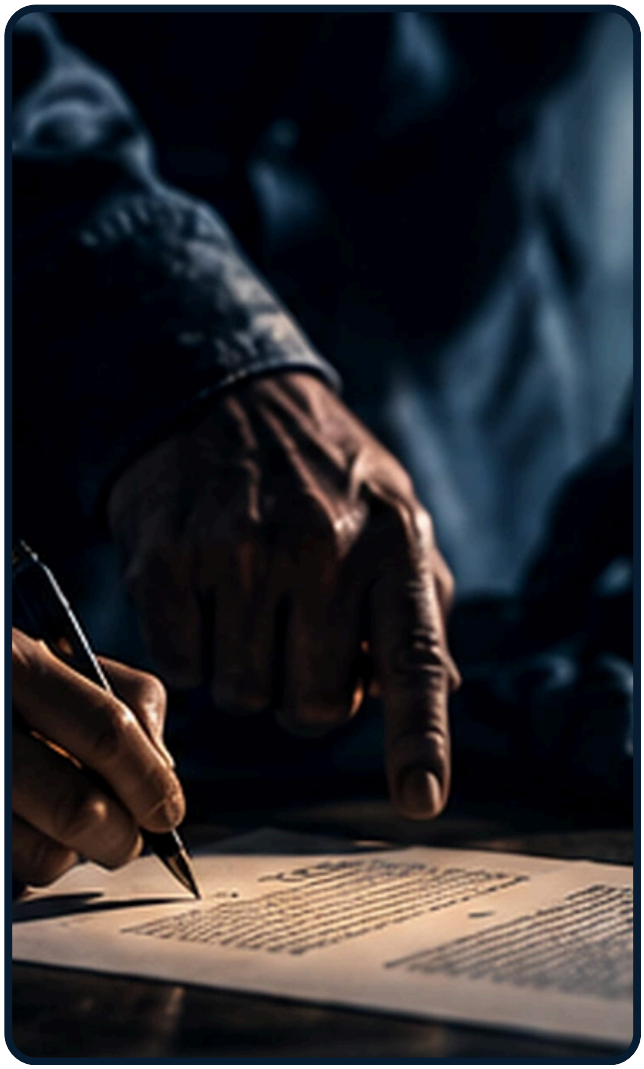
2. A Signature Is Not Sufficient Proof of the Accuracy of the Contents

There is a fundamental distinction between three situations:
- A defendant makes a confession and signs it after freely reading it.
- A defendant signs a document without being allowed to read it or while under threat.
- A defendant challenges statements attributed to them, maintaining that they never made those statements in the first place.

The first situation may constitute evidence subject to examination under the law. The second and third, however, raise serious questions about the integrity of the evidence itself.
The complaints attributed to Sheikh Sanqour relate particularly to the third situation, while the testimonies of previously detained individuals provide clear examples of the second.

3. A Lengthy Interrogation Record Requires Examination of Timing and Physical Evidence

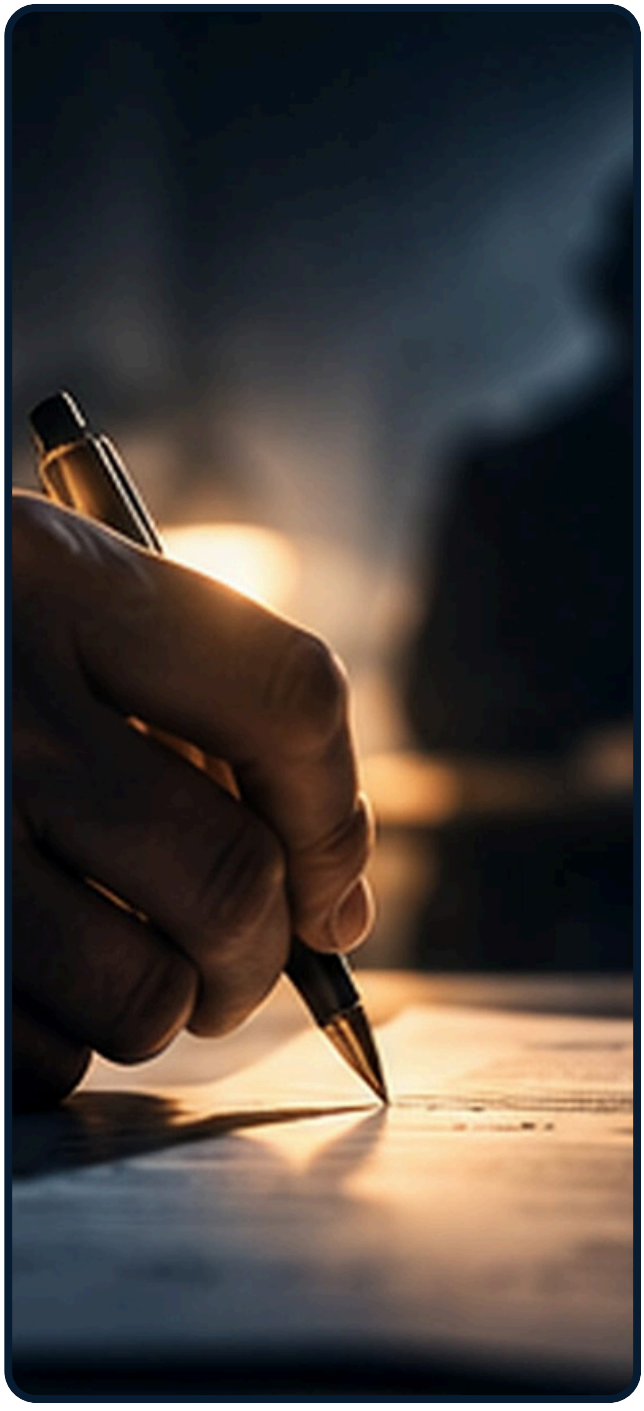
When a statement runs to dozens of pages while the person concerned says he was asked only a limited number of questions, it becomes necessary to examine the duration of the interrogation, the identity of the person who recorded the statements, the sequence of questions, any available recordings, and the manner in which the interrogation record was reviewed.
This becomes even more important in light of the complaint concerning a case file exceeding 6,000 pages and restrictions on the defense team's access to it.
Justice requires that lawyers be able to trace how evidence was produced, rather than merely being shown its final form.



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4. The Role of the Public Prosecution Must Be Part of the Scrutiny, Not a Point at Which Coercion Is Presumed to Have Ended

In several testimonies documented by Human Rights Watch and the Bahrain Center for Human Rights, detainees said they had been subjected to pressure upon being referred to the Public Prosecution, or that they feared being returned to the investigating authorities if they retracted their confessions.
If such a pattern is established in a particular case, the mere transfer of a defendant from a detention facility to the Public Prosecution's office is not, in itself, sufficient to establish that the defendant acted of their own free will.
The real test lies in the circumstances of the interrogation, the possibility of obtaining legal counsel, and the investigation of any torture complaints before statements are relied upon as evidence.



5. The Absence of a Lawyer Deprives Defendants of a Crucial Safeguard for Their Statements

When defendants are denied contact with their lawyers, or when the defense cannot access interrogation records at an early stage, their ability to immediately challenge discrepancies between what they actually said and what was recorded is diminished.
It also becomes more difficult to document threats, request medical examinations, or secure the preservation of surveillance recordings.
This helps explain the recurring connection identified in human rights reports between coerced confessions and restrictions on access to lawyers.

6. Recurring Allegations Raise Questions About Institutional Accountability

Similar testimonies alone are not sufficient to establish the existence of a single centralized plan or to implicate individuals whose actions have not been investigated. However, the continued emergence of allegations of the same nature, despite the publication of an official report in 2011 and UN recommendations in 2017 and 2026, raises legitimate questions about the effectiveness of mechanisms for prevention, investigation, and accountability.

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The measure is not the number of legal provisions prohibiting torture, but whether detainees can, in practice, file complaints safely, obtain independent medical examinations, have their statements excluded ,when proven to have been extracted under coercion .and ensure that those responsible are held accountable

What Does Bahraini Law Say?

Article 19 of Bahrain's Constitution prohibits physical and psychological torture and treatment that degrades human dignity. It also provides that statements and confessions proven to have been obtained through torture, threats, or other prohibited forms of coercion are null and void. Article 20 further guarantees the presumption of innocence and the safeguards necessary for exercising the right to a defense.
Article 15 of the Convention Against Torture, which is binding on Bahrain, prohibits the use of any statement proven to have been obtained through torture as evidence in judicial proceedings, except against a person accused of torture as evidence that the statement was made.
Accordingly, a defendant's signature cannot be regarded as conclusive proof of the integrity of a confession when credible evidence emerges that warrants examining the circumstances under which it was obtained.



Six Questions in Search of Justice

Several specific issues must be subjected to investigation:

1. Are there audio or video recordings of his interrogation, and what do they establish regarding the number of questions asked and the content of his answers?
2. How long did he spend before the investigating authority, and is that duration consistent with the volume of statements attributed to him?
3. Have any discrepancies emerged between his actual statements and the interrogation records, and who was responsible for recording and reviewing them?
4. Was an independent medical examination conducted following his complaint about being forced to stand blindfolded and the deterioration of his health?
5. Were his lawyers able to obtain a complete copy of the evidence and interrogation records and discuss their contents?

6. Was an independent investigation opened into the allegations of coercion or distortion of statements, and were the relevant recordings and records preserved?



Report

Who Investigates the Investigators?

From Sayyed Mohammed al-Mousawi's Body to the Trial of Religious Scholars: How Are Violations Concealed Behind Investigative Procedures in Bahrain?

An investigation into the circumstances surrounding the death of Sayyed Mohammed Abdulmohsen al-Mousawi and testimonies of torture and coercion in the trial of religious scholars in Bahrain.

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Who Investigates the Investigators?

From Sayyed Mohammed al-Mousawi's Body to the Trial of Religious Scholars: How Are Violations Concealed Behind Investigative Procedures in Bahrain?

When Sayyed Mohammed al-Mousawi's family received his body after days of searching for him, they were confronted with more than a mysterious death. They also faced questions about the days he had spent in detention, the authorities' statements about the cause of his death, and which body was supposed to investigate those responsible. Months later, allegations of torture and coercion raised during the trial of religious scholars revived the same question: Can the institutions responsible for ensuring accountability uncover what happens inside interrogation rooms, or do they reveal only as much of the truth as the scope of their investigations allows?

Days of Enforced Disappearance Before His Death

In the early hours of March 19, 2026, contact was lost with 32-year-old Sayyed Mohammed Abdulmohsen al-Mousawi. He had spent part of the night attending a Ramadan religious commemoration before leaving with others. His family then began searching for him. According to accounts documented by human rights organizations, family members tried to determine his whereabouts through the security authorities. However, they received no clear information confirming his detention or identifying his location. The uncertainty continued for days.

On March 27, the family received a call asking them to go to the Bahrain Defence Force Hospital. There, they learned that their son had died. The shock was not limited to the news of his death. Visible injuries on his body raised serious suspicions among those who saw them that he had been subjected to severe violence while in detention.

That same day, the Ministry of Interior announced that al-Mousawi had been detained by the National Intelligence Agency on espionage-related charges. It also stated that the circulating images of his injuries were inaccurate and had been used to stir public opinion.



This Is Where the Story at the Heart of This Investigation Begins

Between a prisoner of conscience whose family had searched for him alive, a body returned to them by the authorities, and an official statement addressing the accusations against him and the accuracy of photographs showing his injuries, several days remained unaccounted for. During that time, the public had no knowledge of what had happened inside his place of detention.

The first question should have been: How did a person die while in the custody of security agencies? Yet the initial official account gave considerable prominence to the security accusations against him, while the circumstances of his death remained without a complete explanation.



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The Official Account Under Scrutiny

Al-Mousawi's case takes on particular significance when the official statements issued about it are compared. On March 27, the Ministry of Interior questioned the accuracy of the circulating images showing his injuries. According to human rights documentation, the family was told that al-Mousawi had been taken to hospital following a heart attack and that attempts to resuscitate him had failed. However, photographs of his body and accounts from those who examined it raised different suspicions.

In a statement dated March 27, Euro-Med Human Rights Monitor pointed to visible injuries that warranted an investigation into whether al-Mousawi had been subjected to torture or cruel treatment. An independent medical review was also conducted of photographs and video footage of his body. An expert consulted by a human rights organization concluded that the pattern of injuries was highly consistent with repeated violence and was not consistent with a cardiac-related explanation for the death alone.

On April 16, 2026, the Special Investigation Unit announced that it had completed its investigation into the detainee's death and referred a member of the National Intelligence Agency for trial on a charge of assault resulting in death. The Unit explained that it had received a notification from the Inspector General of the National Intelligence Agency stating that the detainee had been assaulted by a member of the agency. The assault had caused multiple injuries that led to his death.

On June 2, the First High Criminal Court sentenced the accused employee to life imprisonment.



Thus, in less than three months, the case moved from public doubts about the accuracy of photographs showing the injuries and the circulation of a medical explanation for the death, to official acknowledgment of a fatal assault, followed by a life sentence.

From Denying the Injuries to Limiting Responsibility

The life sentence represents an important judicial step toward holding one of those responsible for al-Mousawi's death accountable. This outcome should not be overlooked when assessing the performance of the Special Investigation Unit.

However, there is a difference between establishing one person's responsibility and conducting a thorough investigation into the institutional circumstances that allowed the assault to occur. According to publicly available information, the judgment concerned a single employee.

Questions remain about how al-Mousawi was detained, who supervised his detention, which authorities were aware of his injuries, when medical assistance was requested, and why his family was not informed of his whereabouts during the days preceding his death. Not all these questions have been addressed in published information sufficient to allow a comprehensive independent assessment.

The legal classification of the incident also raises questions about the nature of the violence used. The defendant was convicted of assault resulting in death. Human rights organizations, however, argue that the reported injuries and circumstances warrant an investigation into whether the crime of torture was committed. The legal definition of torture involves the infliction of severe pain or suffering for a specific purpose, along with the involvement or consent of a public official.



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On April 16, the Bahrain Forum for Human Rights .criticized the decision to refer only one person for trial It called for an examination of supervisory responsibility -and full disclosure of the circumstances surrounding al .Mousawi's detention and death

What Was Left Out of the Statement?

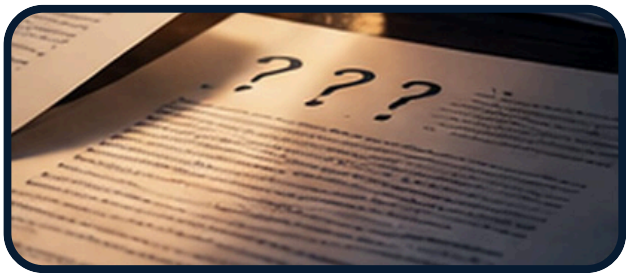
One of the most pressing questions raised by the Bahrain Forum for Human Rights concerns the fate of other individuals who were arrested or disappeared in the same context.
In April 2026, the Forum reported that the places of detention of five individuals had still not been officially and adequately disclosed to their families, according to the information available to it at the time.
The Forum linked this uncertainty to al-Mousawi's death, warning that continued incommunicado detention could expose these individuals to similar risks.
It is important, however, to distinguish between what the organization documented in April and the current circumstances of those individuals, which require separate, updated verification.

Yet the question it raised remains fundamental:

If an investigation reveals that a detainee died as a result of an assault by a security officer, were protective measures immediately extended to others detained under similar circumstances or in connection with the same case? Was their safety verified? Were they allowed to contact their lawyers and families? And did they undergo independent medical examinations?
An investigation into a death should not be limited to reconstructing the victim's final hours. It should also help prevent similar violations from occurring against others.

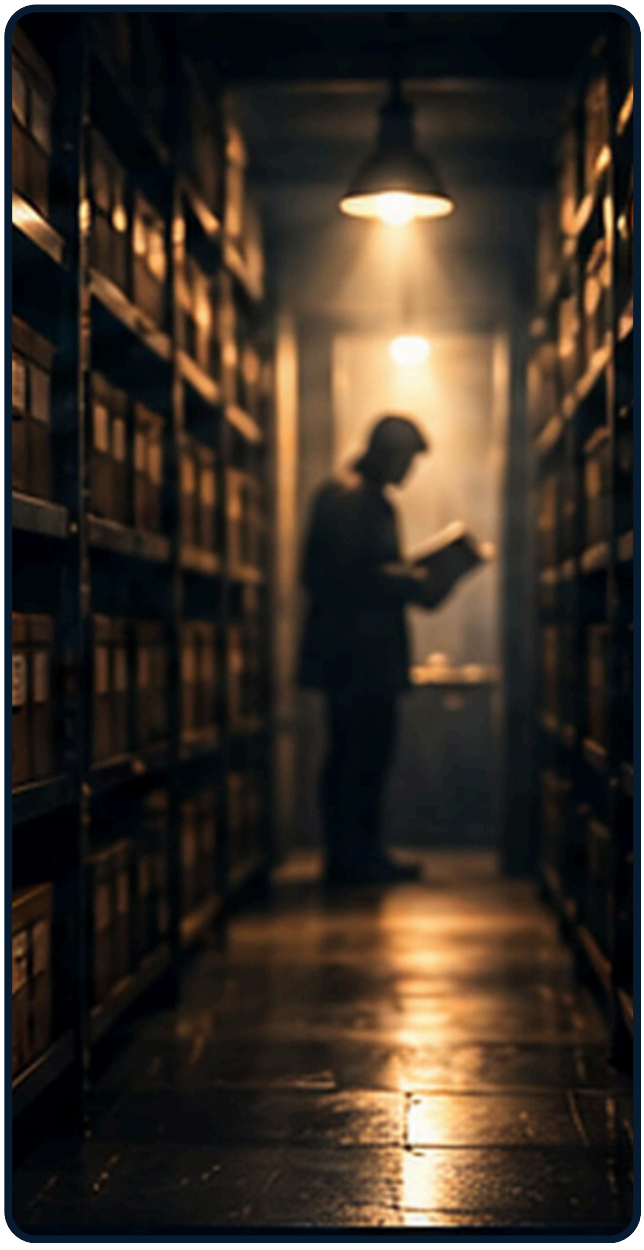
How Do Mechanisms for Concealing Violations Develop?

When examined alongside previous human rights reports on Bahrain, al-Mousawi's case reveals four recurring institutional problems that can lead to violations being concealed or delays in exposing them.



First: Lack of Information During Detention

When a family does not know where a relative is being held and a lawyer cannot gain access to the detainee, the initial period of detention becomes less subject to external oversight. At this stage, the documentation of injuries, the filing of complaints, or access to an independent medical examination may be delayed. This can result in the loss of evidence that cannot be recovered later.



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Second: Official Control Over Initial Evidence

The authorities responsible for detention typically retain arrest, transfer, and custody records, video recordings, medical files, and the names of officers who dealt with the detainee.
When allegations of torture arise, these materials become potential evidence of a violation while remaining under the control of institutions whose own personnel may be under investigation. A declared willingness to cooperate is therefore not enough. Evidence must be preserved immediately and made available to a genuinely independent body.

Third: Issuing an Early Official Explanation Before Verification Is Complete

In al-Mousawi's case, official doubts about the accuracy of photographs showing his injuries preceded the later disclosure that an assault had caused his death.
This highlights a risk that does not necessarily require proof of a deliberate plan to conceal a violation. Early institutional statements may downplay evidence or testimony before it has been examined, or shift public attention away from the circumstances of the harm and toward the victim's reputation and the accusations against him.

Fourth: Established Institutional Responsibility and the Narrowing of Accountability to a Single Perpetrator

The established facts in the case of Sayyed Mohammed Abdulmohsen al-Mousawi do not allow what happened to be reduced to an isolated act by one individual.
Al-Mousawi had been held by the National Intelligence Agency since March 19, 2026, and died from injuries sustained in an assault during his detention, according to the Special Investigation Unit's own announcement.
The Unit's statement also acknowledged that the Inspector General of the National Intelligence Agency had notified it of the incident and that the injured detainee had been transferred to hospital before his death.

The incident therefore occurred within an official detention system in which responsibilities for custody, supervision, detainee protection, medical care, and reporting violations are distributed among different personnel. These are established institutional responsibilities that do not disappear simply because the officer who directly committed the assault has been identified.
The publicly announced judicial proceedings resulted in a life sentence for a member of the agency, establishing criminal accountability for a serious act. However, convicting the perpetrator does not, in itself, resolve the question of the state's responsibility to protect a person under its complete control.
Nor does it eliminate the need to examine whether other officials knew about the assault, allowed it to continue, or failed to prevent it or provide the victim with timely medical assistance.
Under the Minnesota Protocol on the Investigation of Potentially Unlawful Death, investigations must extend to those in the chain of command where evidence indicates their involvement. They must also examine institutional failures that, had they been addressed, could have prevented the death.
This does not presume the criminal responsibility of individuals whose actions have not been examined. Rather, it requires that their potential responsibility not be excluded from the scope of the investigation.
The risks of narrowing accountability become more serious when the evolution of the official account is considered. Initial doubts about the accuracy of circulating photographs of al-Mousawi's injuries were followed by an official acknowledgement that an assault had caused his death.
This discrepancy also calls for an investigation into how information was handled within the institutions involved, who knew the true nature of the injuries, when they became aware of them, and how the family and the public were informed.
Identifying the person who committed the assault is not enough if the circumstances that allowed it to occur and continue, or delayed its discovery and prevention, remain beyond scrutiny and accountability.
Responsibility in al-Mousawi's case is therefore not limited to an individual when it comes to the state's duty to protect, oversee, and investigate. Whether criminal responsibility extends to other employees or officials, however, must be determined through an independent investigation into the chain of command and possible failures to fulfill their duties.

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This exposes one of the most serious gaps in the accountability system: the possibility of limiting a crime to an individual who has already been convicted, while the institutional structure within which that individual operated remains outside the scope of full public scrutiny.
Justice is not achieved solely by convicting the person who assaulted a detainee. It also requires identifying those responsible for protecting him, determining who failed to fulfill their duties, and establishing what allowed the violation to escalate to the point of death.

Trial of Religious Scholars: The Risk When Complaints Fail to Uncover the Truth

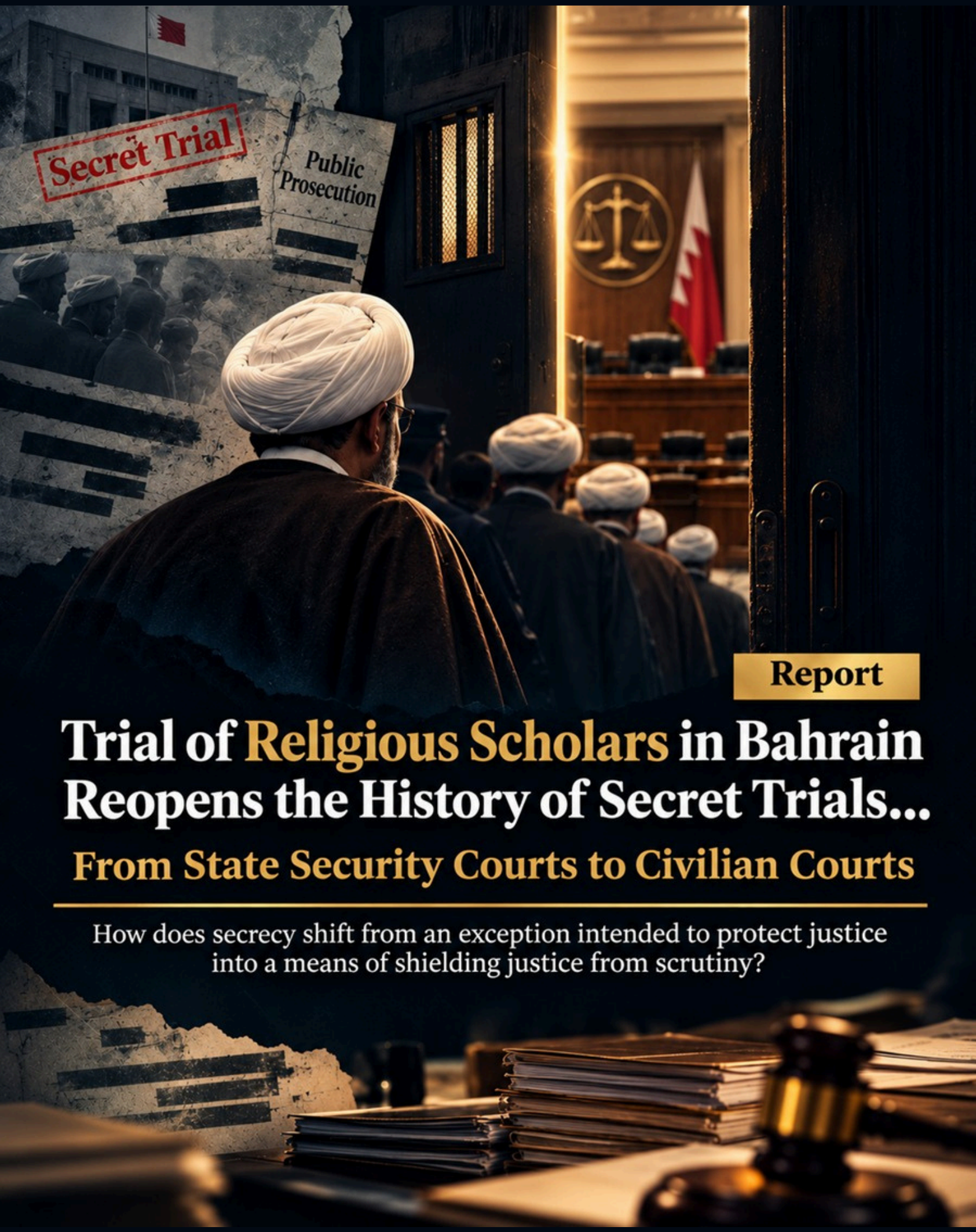
Weeks after al-Mousawi's death, a campaign of arrests linked to the trial of Shia religious scholars began in May 2026. On July 16, SALAM for Democracy and Human Rights published testimonies alleging that several detained scholars had been subjected to beatings, sectarian insults, threats, and coercion to sign interrogation records.
The Bahrain Forum for Human Rights also published information received from lawyers and local sources concerning ill-treatment, restrictions on the defense, and allegations of coerced confessions.
In the first case, a detainee died, the authorities subsequently acknowledged that a fatal assault had occurred, and a security officer was convicted.
In the second case, testimonies describe threats and coercion during interrogation. What remains necessary is to ensure that these allegations are independently investigated before they lead to harm that may be difficult to remedy.

What Needs to Be Disclosed Now?

Full accountability in al-Mousawi's case requires the publication of information that would allow the investigation to be assessed without compromising the family's privacy or the integrity of any ongoing judicial proceedings.
This includes clarifying the sequence of events during his detention from March 19, identifying the authorities responsible for his custody and interrogation, and establishing when his injuries were discovered and when he was transferred to hospital. It also includes the medical reports that determined the cause of death and clarification of whether supervisory responsibilities or other possible failures were investigated.

The authorities must also explain what protective measures were taken regarding other detainees whose safety had raised concerns in the same context.
In the trial of religious scholars, the duty to prevent violations requires safe channels for submitting torture complaints and independent medical and psychological examinations whenever there are serious grounds for concern. Interrogation recordings and related records must be preserved, and complainants, their families, and their lawyers must be protected from retaliation.
A complaint must not become merely an administrative procedure that ends with a brief notification, leaving the complainant unaware of how the conclusion was reached.
Under Articles 12 and 13 of the Convention against Torture, prompt and impartial investigations must be conducted whenever there are reasonable grounds to believe that torture has occurred, and complainants and witnesses must be protected. The prohibition of torture also requires the state to prevent the use of statements proven to have been obtained through torture.





Report

Trial of Religious Scholars in Bahrain Reopens the History of Secret Trials...

From State Security Courts to Civilian Courts

How does secrecy shift from an exception intended to protect justice into a means of shielding justice from scrutiny?

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Trial of Religious Scholars in Bahrain Reopens the History of Secret Trials... From State Security Courts to Civilian Courts

Accusations are made public, and newspapers circulate official accounts. Yet courtroom doors are not equally open to those seeking to observe how those accusations are examined. In the trial of dozens of Shia religious scholars in Bahrain, the issue concerns not only the fate of the defendants but also the public's right to know what takes place inside courtrooms. This trial is not an isolated incident. Rather, it revives a longstanding question that has followed Bahrain's justice system for decades: When does secrecy cease to be an exception intended to protect justice and become a means of shielding it from scrutiny?

Accusations Made Public... Trial Behind Closed Doors

When the trial of Shia religious scholars in Bahrain began on July 5, 2026, the accusations had already reached newspapers and media outlets before the public could enter the courtroom. The Public Prosecution announced details of a wide-ranging security case involving a banned group, foreign connections, and financial, organizational, and religious activities. Media outlets relayed the official account, while dozens of religious scholars faced judicial proceedings that could determine their fate for many years to come.

The events began with arrests on May 9, 2026, when the authorities announced the detention of 41 people. The prosecutions subsequently expanded to include related cases involving more than 40 defendants. On July 5, one of the announced trials began, involving a group of 19 defendants. Further referrals to court and hearings followed later that month.

This was not an ordinary trial with limited implications. It involved religious scholars, preachers, teachers at religious seminaries, and figures known for their social and religious roles. While the official account of the accusations dominated media coverage, human rights organizations presented a different description of the circumstances in which the hearings were held.



In a report published on July 16, 2026, the Bahrain Forum for Human Rights stated that the defendants appeared before the court via video link from their places of detention. Attendance inside the courtroom was restricted to the parties involved in the proceedings.

According to information published by the Forum, the defendants again participated via video link during the second hearing. Concerns were raised about the ability to hear their statements and effectively follow their participation. Then came the August 19 hearing, which lasted more than thirteen hours. Defendants, witnesses, and judges participated from separate locations, with testimony heard via video link.



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This is where a contradiction arises that cannot be overlooked: How can accusations affecting the freedom and reputation of dozens of citizens be presented so widely to the public, while the public is not given a comparable opportunity to observe how those accusations are examined?

When Media Condemnation Precedes a Court Verdict

One of the most serious consequences of restricting attendance at a trial is the imbalance it creates between competing accounts. The Public Prosecution has the authority to issue official statements, and its information reaches media outlets as an account issued by a state institution.

The defendant, meanwhile, who is presumed innocent until proven guilty, faces greater difficulty conveying what actually took place during the hearing, particularly when proceedings are not subject to independent media and human rights monitoring. In a statement issued after the first hearing, the Bahrain Forum for Human Rights criticized official language that it said went beyond presenting the charges, portraying disputed allegations as though they had been established as facts.

The consequences of this problem extend beyond the language used in media coverage. Accusations involving terrorism or foreign connections can have profound effects on an individual's reputation and social standing. Their impact may also extend to the individual's family, employment, and religious and social institutions. When such accusations are widely publicized while their examination in court remains less accessible to the public, the risk of social condemnation before a court verdict becomes more pronounced.



A Constitution That Guarantees Public Hearings... and Legislation That Expands the Exceptions

Bahrain's Constitution does not leave the principle of public court hearings to unrestricted administrative discretion. The third paragraph of Article 105 establishes that court hearings shall be public and permits exceptions to this principle only in circumstances specified by law.

However, the human rights concern arises from the broad discretion the constitutional provision leaves to legislators in defining those exceptions. It also stems from the way subsequent legislation has developed within a political context marked by extensive security-related trials and repeated criticism of restrictions on judicial scrutiny.

In 2012, Decree-Law No. 53 amended Article 214 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, expanding the grounds for holding hearings in private. In addition to the existing grounds of public order and morality, the amendment introduced considerations relating to the protection of victims, witnesses, and individuals providing information in a case. It also preserved the court's authority to close all or part of a hearing or prevent certain categories of people from attending.

The central human rights criticism concerns the broad wording of the provisions allowing restrictions on public hearings. It also concerns the absence of an explicit requirement in the same article for detailed, published reasons explaining the necessity, scope, and duration of such restrictions.

In political and security-related cases, prosecuting authorities hold considerable institutional influence, while considerations of security and information protection are frequently invoked. This creates particular risks that an exception may become an extended practice whose necessity is difficult for the public to scrutinize.

Concerns about the expansion of judicial exceptions were further reinforced by the 2017 constitutional amendment. The amendment removed the previous constitutional restriction in Article 105(b), which had generally limited military court jurisdiction to military offenses committed by members of the armed forces and security services. At the time, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch considered that the amendment opened the door to military trials of civilians and raised concerns about fair trial guarantees.

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Although the 2017 amendment did not directly address the confidentiality of court hearings, it remains significant in examining the development of the legal framework governing security-related trials. Exceptional powers relating to judicial jurisdiction were expanded alongside broader legislative grounds permitting restrictions on public hearings.

1995: Trials Described as Public, Yet the Public Could Not Enter

In September 1995, Amnesty International published a report titled “Bahrain: A Human Rights Crisis,” examining the arrests and trials that followed protests demanding political reforms and the restoration of parliamentary life.
At the time, the State Security Court was among the institutions facing severe criticism from human rights organizations. Amnesty International documented hearings held at a Coast Guard facility in Muharraq, a location that made it easier for the authorities to control access to the court and prevent members of the public from entering.
The most telling detail was that official records described the hearings as public. Amnesty International, however, reported a different reality. Attendance was limited to judges, defendants, lawyers, and prosecutors, while relatives, journalists, and independent observers were barred from attending.
At one hearing, some relatives and journalists were allowed to enter and photograph the defendants. The authorities subsequently assured Amnesty International that the trials were public. The problem, therefore, was not simply the absence of a legal provision, but the use of the term "public" as an official description that did not reflect people's actual experience.

2011: The Return of Exceptional Courts

More than fifteen years after those events, Bahrain returned to the use of exceptional courts during the events of 2011. In March of that year, a State of National Safety was declared, and courts comprising military and civilian judges were established to try defendants in connection with the protests.

In its February 2012 report, “No Justice in Bahrain,” Human Rights Watch documented multiple violations of fair trial guarantees before the National Safety Courts and civilian courts. Restrictions on public oversight were among the prominent concerns.
The organization reported that the authorities had not allowed its representatives to attend National Safety Court hearings, despite government statements indicating that civil society organizations, human rights groups, and media outlets could attend. It also documented closed hearings held without adequate justification, as well as inconsistencies in which parties were permitted to observe the trials.
The National Safety Courts faced widespread international criticism and were subsequently discontinued, with cases transferred to civilian courts. However, ending the exceptional courts was not, in itself, sufficient to ensure that all the problems associated with them had been resolved.

From Military to Civilian Courts... Did the Restrictions End?

Debate over politically sensitive trials continued in 2012, even after prominent cases were transferred to civilian courts. In the case involving opposition leaders, known as the trial of a group of prominent political figures, restrictions were imposed on media coverage and public attendance during some appeal hearings. International human rights reports addressed these restrictions, warning of continuing shortcomings in fair trial guarantees.
The transfer to civilian courts was supposed to restore the safeguards that defendants had lacked before exceptional courts. However, experience showed that the designation of a court alone does not guarantee openness in its proceedings. A court may be civilian, yet attendance may remain restricted. A judge may have legal jurisdiction to hear a case, yet the public's right to observe the proceedings may still be undermined.

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The Return of Secret Military Trials: From Constitutional Amendment to the Concealment of Justice

The return of civilian trials before military courts in Bahrain in 2017 was not merely another legislative amendment. It represented a reversal of one of the safeguards introduced following the violations committed by the National Safety Courts in 2011.

In April 2017, an amendment to Article 105(b) of the Constitution was ratified, followed by an amendment to the Military Judiciary Law under Law No. 12 of 2017. These changes allowed military court jurisdiction to be expanded to include civilians accused in security-related cases.

Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch warned that this development reopened the door to exceptional trials lacking guarantees of judicial independence, public hearings, and fair trial rights, particularly in cases involving the political opposition.

The consequences soon became apparent. In October 2017, the first military trials of civilians following the amendment began. Among the defendants was Sayed Alawi Hussein, whose incommunicado detention and alleged enforced disappearance for nearly a year before his referral to military court were documented by Human Rights Watch.

The danger was therefore no longer limited to the existence of an exceptional legal provision. It also involved once again subjecting civilians to military judicial authority in political and security-related cases, after years of demands for guarantees against a recurrence of the violations of 2011.

A joint human rights report titled “Death or Confession,” published in December 2017 by the Bahrain Center for Human Rights, the Bahrain Forum for Human Rights, SALAM for Democracy and Human Rights, and the Gulf Institute for Democracy and Human Rights, reveals a particularly serious aspect of this return.

The report documented the military court's decision to hold hearings in secret and prohibit the circulation or media publication of information about the case without the court's permission, on the grounds of public interest and the protection of evidence and witnesses.

However, testimonies collected from lawyers and victims revealed a different impact of the secrecy. They described limitations on defendants' contact with their families, refusals to provide defense lawyers with copies of case files, and difficulties raising allegations of torture before the court. The report also stated that some lawyers had received threats if they disclosed violations to human rights organizations or the media.

At one hearing, four defendants who had been denied visits were allowed to meet their families and lawyers inside the courtroom for no more than five minutes, according to the published documentation.

The Bahrain Forum for Human Rights criticized the notion that the presence of a representative of the National Institution for Human Rights at one hearing was sufficient to ensure oversight. It stressed that the representative's attendance neither overturned the decision to hold hearings in secret nor replaced the need to investigate detainees' complaints.

This revealed one of the most serious consequences of closing court proceedings to the public. According to the organizations' findings, secrecy was no longer limited to protecting sensitive information. It had become, according to the organizations' findings, an obstacle to public awareness of torture allegations and to scrutiny of how the judiciary addressed them.

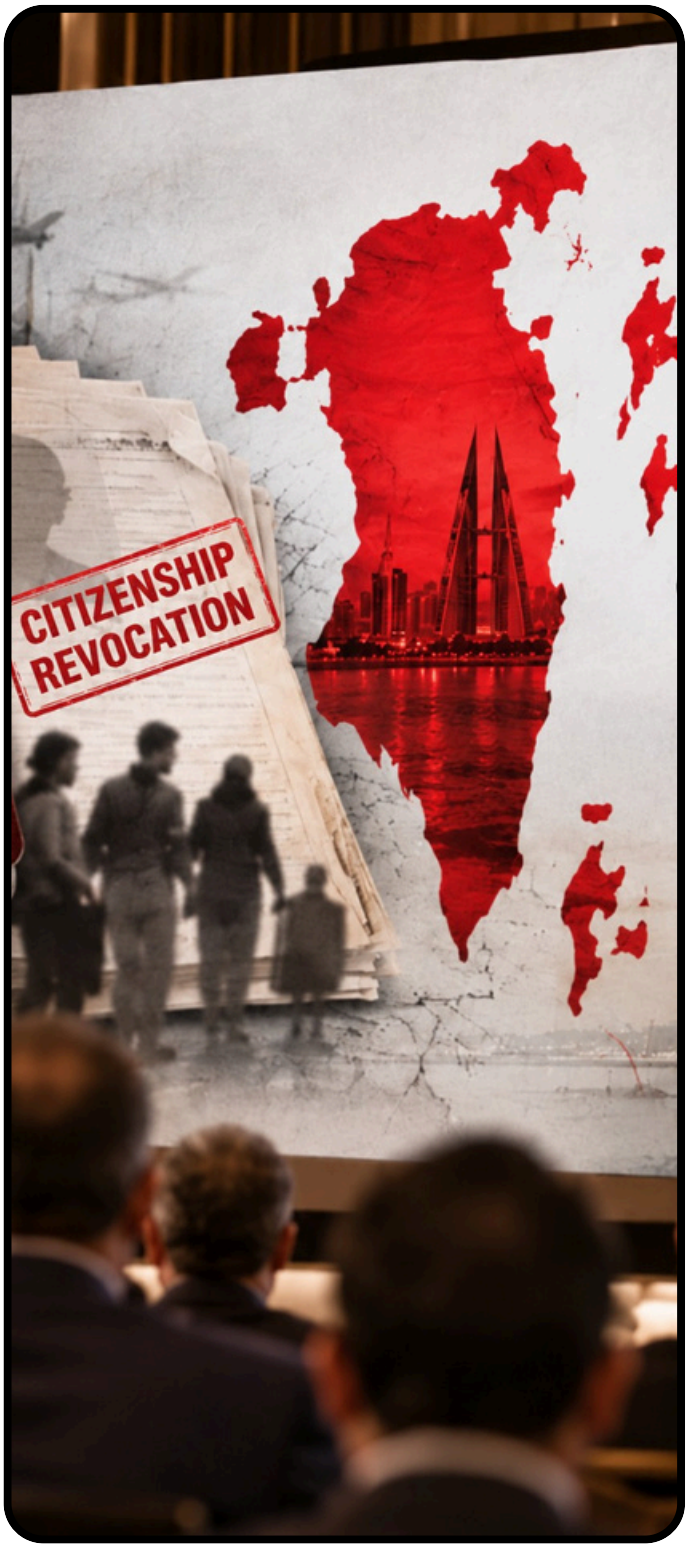
This experience takes on renewed significance when examining the trial of religious scholars in 2026, despite the fact that it is being held before civilian courts. The reported restrictions on public access to hearings revive the same question that surrounded military trials: Is secrecy being used to protect a specific judicial interest, or is its scope being expanded to the point of depriving defendants, their families, and the public of independent oversight of proceedings affecting liberty, life, and human dignity?

The lesson of military trials after 2017 is that justice is not safeguarded merely by the existence of a court that issues judgments. It also requires ensuring that court proceedings are open to scrutiny and that secrecy remains a justified exception, rather than a shield that prevents violations from being exposed and those responsible from being held accountable.



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News Reports



- Report Documents Citizenship Revocation of 69 People, Including 26 Children, and Warns of Repercussions
- Arrests of Shia Reciters and Mourning Hall Officials Bring Religious Persecution Back into the Spotlight in Bahrain

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Report Documents Citizenship Revocation of 69 People, Including 26 Children, and Warns of Repercussions

Three Human Rights Organizations Launch "69: Deprivation of identity, Deprivation of Homeland" Report on Citizenship Revocation and Forcible Deportation from Bahrain

SALAM for Democracy and Human Rights, the Bahrain Forum for Human Rights, and Watan Organization jointly launched a human rights report on Friday, November 6, 2026, titled "69: Deprivation of identity, Deprivation of Homeland: Citizenship Revocation and Forcible Deportation from Bahrain." The report sheds light on citizenship revocation decisions issued in April 2026 and the resulting violations and legal, humanitarian, and social repercussions affecting dozens of Bahraini citizens and their families.

Based on human rights monitoring, legal analysis, and documented testimonies from a number of affected individuals, the report reveals that 69 people were stripped of their Bahraini citizenship on April 27, 2026, including 26 children, the youngest a baby girl just 19 days old. The decisions also extended to family members by association, without individual trials or adequate judicial safeguards, according to the report's findings.

The report explains that these decisions came amid the regional escalation witnessed in 2026, during which the Bahraini authorities relied on malicious accusations. Its authors argue that these accusations were formulated in broad and vague terms, without presenting individual judicial evidence establishing the responsibility of everyone affected by the decisions.

Documenting Violations Beyond Citizenship Revocation

The report highlights a series of measures that followed the citizenship revocation decisions, including the confiscation of passports and identity cards, forcing some affected individuals to sign undertakings to leave the country, and requiring them to cover their own travel expenses. It also documents cases of forced deportation, family separation, and the loss of legal and economic stability.

It also presents documented testimonies and cases involving individuals who found themselves outside Bahrain without valid national documents or guarantees of return, while facing difficulties obtaining residency and legal protection in the countries to which they had relocated.

The report warns of the far-reaching effects of these measures on children, women, and the elderly, particularly regarding the rights to identity, education, healthcare, family life, and freedom of movement. It also highlights the risks of statelessness and the potential long-term deprivation of fundamental rights.



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Continuation of a Previous Policy

In reviewing the historical background, the report notes that the April 2026 decisions do not represent an isolated incident but rather an extension of the policy of citizenship revocation witnessed in Bahrain since 2012.

According to the monitoring findings presented in the report, 985 people were stripped of their citizenship between 2012 and 2019, before citizenship was restored to 551 of them in April 2019. The 2026 decisions have brought the issue back to the forefront of human rights discussions.

Legal Conclusions and Urgent Recommendations

The report concludes that the documented measures raise concerns relating to the right to nationality, the prohibition of arbitrary deprivation of nationality, the right to a fair trial and judicial remedies, as well as the protection of children and the prevention of discrimination and forced deportation.

In the recommendations outlined in the report, the three organizations stress the need to annul the citizenship revocation decisions and restore citizenship and official documents to those affected, including children who lost their nationality by association. They also call for an end to forced deportations and guarantees of the right of deported individuals to return safely to their homeland.

The organizations further call for any decision concerning citizenship to be subject to independent judicial oversight, with guarantees of the rights to defense and appeal. They also recommend reviewing relevant legislation, conducting independent investigations into allegations of coercion, ill-treatment, and discrimination, and providing redress for the harm suffered by victims and their families.

The organizations urge the relevant United Nations mechanisms and the international community to follow up on the issue, encourage the Bahraini authorities to fulfill their international human rights commitments, and take the necessary measures to prevent cases of statelessness, including accession to relevant international conventions.

The launch of the joint report comes as part of the three organizations' efforts to document the circumstances of those affected, highlight the legal and humanitarian dimensions of citizenship revocation decisions, and put forward practical recommendations to address their consequences. It is grounded in the principle that the right to nationality is closely linked to identity, belonging, and the enjoyment of all other fundamental rights, and that the protection of security should not come at the expense of constitutional and legal safeguards or human rights.



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Arrests of Shia Reciters and Mourning Hall Officials Bring Religious Persecution Back into the Spotlight in Bahrain

New Arrests and Extended Detention of Participants in Religious Rituals: Bahrain Forum for Human Rights Warns of Expanding Security Crackdowns and Restrictions on Shia Religious Freedoms

The arrests of several Shia reciters and mourning hall officials in Bahrain during October 2026 have brought the issue of religious persecution back into the spotlight. Human rights organisations have warned of widening security crackdowns targeting Shia citizens over their practice of religious rituals, as restrictions on mourning processions and Hussaini religious gatherings continue. These developments have raised concerns about the future of religious freedoms and the independence of religious institutions in the country.

In a statement issued on October 26, 2026, the Bahrain Forum for Human Rights (BFHR) documented the arrests of reciter Sayed Jalal al-Baladi, Mulla Habib al-Dirazi, and reciter Abdullah al-Matrouk, as well as the detention of Mr. Habib Abbas Khamis, head of the Haj Ahmed bin Khamis Hussainiya. The Forum considered these measures a continuation of security campaigns targeting Shia reciters, preachers, and those responsible for managing mourning halls and Hussainiyas over recent months.

According to BFHR, Sayed Jalal al-Baladi was arrested on October 25 following previous security summonses related to his participation in Shia religious commemorations. Mulla Habib al-Dirazi was arrested on October 24 after a video circulated showing him reciting Ziyarat Ashura. The Forum also reported that security forces raided the home of reciter Abdullah al-Matrouk and arrested him without informing him of the reasons for his arrest or the charges against him. His arrest followed his participation in a mourning procession commemorating the martyrdom of Lady Fatima al-Zahra (peace be upon her).

The measures were not limited to participants in mourning processions but also extended to those responsible for managing religious institutions, including the head of the Haj Ahmed bin Khamis Hussainiya. BFHR sees this development as an indication that security crackdowns are expanding beyond those practising religious rituals to include those organising and overseeing them.

In subsequent developments, human rights organisations reported on November 2 that the detention of several individuals had been extended pending investigation, including Mulla Habib al-Dirazi and reciters Jalal al-Baladi and Abdullah al-Matrouk. Reports citing BFHR also indicated that the detention of Sayed Ibrahim al-Alawi had been extended. On November 3, Mr. Habib Abbas Khamis was released after several days in detention.

Escalating Arrests and Restrictions on Religious Rituals

In its statement issued on October 26, 2026, BFHR reported that approximately 48 people, including reciters, heads of mourning halls, and their caretakers, had been arrested between the beginning of the year and October 13. According to the Forum's documentation, this figure indicates an expansion of security crackdowns linked to religious commemorations.

BFHR had previously warned, during July and August 2026, of restrictions imposed by the authorities on religious commemorations. These included preventing mourning processions from taking place, confining certain ceremonies to mourning halls and Hussainiyas, and setting specific times for religious activities to end. The Forum noted that these measures had led to the cancellation of dozens of mourning processions and religious gatherings, including commemorations at 53 mourning halls marking the martyrdom of Imam Hassan (peace be upon him), as well as more than 50 processions during the commemoration of the martyrdom of Imam al-Ridha (peace be upon him).

In a joint report entitled "Criminalising Religious Doctrine and Rituals," released in October 2026 by the Bahrain Forum for Human Rights and SALAM for Democracy and Human Rights, the two organisations documented approximately 150 arrests linked to the Ashura commemorations. Those arrested included minors, religious scholars, preachers, reciters, and mourning hall officials. The report also recorded the cancellation of 103 mourning processions or mourning hall commemorations during July and subsequent religious occasions.

The report warned that religious practices were becoming grounds for security targeting and judicial prosecution. It argued that the cumulative restrictions not only target specific individuals but also affect the Shia community's ability to practise its religious rituals and manage its religious institutions independently.

From Restricting Mourning Processions to Monitoring Religious Pulpits

These developments coincide with new regulatory measures affecting religious preaching and recitation. In September 2026, Bahrain's Ministry of Justice, Islamic Affairs and Waqf expanded its licensing system for religious preaching and guidance to include religious sermons, recitation, and related activities, while subjecting licence holders to monitoring of their performance and the content of their religious discourse.

The Ministry justified these amendments as a means of regulating religious activities and preventing the use of places of worship and mourning halls for activities that violate the law. However, BFHR expressed serious concerns that subjecting religious preaching and recitation to licensing and government oversight could interfere with the independence of religious affairs and make the practice of religious rituals conditional on official approval.

According to the Forum, the continued arrests, alongside administrative restrictions imposed on mourning halls and processions, reflect a growing pattern of restrictions on the religious freedoms of Shia citizens. It stressed that these measures extend beyond individual detentions to affect the religious and social life of the community.

Calls to End Security Crackdowns and Guarantee Freedom of Religion and Belief

BFHR stressed that security measures targeting individuals for participating in religious rituals are, in its assessment, inconsistent with Article 22 of Bahrain's Constitution, which guarantees freedom of conscience and the freedom to perform religious rituals, processions, and religious gatherings. The Forum also cited Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which guarantees freedom of religion and belief, and Article 21 of the same Covenant, which protects the right to peaceful assembly.

BFHR called on the Bahraini authorities to release all individuals arrested in connection with their participation in religious commemorations or the organisation of mourning ceremonies, end security summonses and crackdowns, and lift restrictions on mourning processions and religious gatherings. It also called for an independent investigation into hate speech campaigns targeting Shia citizens, religious scholars, and reciters.

The Forum further called on the relevant United Nations Special Rapporteurs on freedom of religion or belief and on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association to monitor these developments, assess Bahrain's compliance with its international human rights obligations, and take action to protect citizens' right to practise their religious rituals without fear of arrest or prosecution.



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Religious Endowments and Politicization!

Sheikh Saeed al-Madeh
Member of the Islamic Scholars Council – One of the Victims of the Malicious Trial of Religious Scholars



Religious endowments (awqaf) are an entirely religious matter and have absolutely nothing to do with politics. Their rules, limits, trusteeship, and all other affairs are governed by the jurisprudential provisions of each Islamic school of thought. This is why Bahrain and other countries have Sunni and Ja'fari endowments. But how did some regimes come to drag them into the political arena?

Our discussion concerns our country, Bahrain. Let us look back briefly to provide some background on the issue.

In the past, religious endowments were targets of theft and looting by senior officials and influential figures. Neither endowment funds nor land were spared. Even agricultural soil was stolen by influential figures. Extensive files document these widely known cases. In reality, endowments were treated as "spoils of war."

The policies pursued at the time were largely aimed at impoverishing the Shia community. This helped ignite the uprising of the 1990s, which began with demands to address unemployment and low wages, problems particularly widespread among the Shia community. The uprising subsequently developed into a political movement demanding reforms to end oppression and discrimination through the establishment of a national parliament in which all citizens' votes would carry equal weight, without sectarian or political discrimination. Such a parliament would be responsible for addressing everyone's problems with justice and fairness.

Then, in the mid-1990s, the regime began using religious endowments as a "weapon of war" after previously treating them as "spoils of war." Once again, endowments were politically exploited against the Shia community, this time as a means of gaining control over mosques and their religious discourse.

This took the form of what became known as the "Imams' Cadre" scheme, which sought to employ imams who led Friday and congregational prayers, with salaries paid by the Ja'fari Endowments Directorate at the time. They were subsequently registered as government employees under the Civil Service Bureau. This formed part of a comprehensive plan to establish absolute, all-encompassing control through the Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs project.

The Shia community's senior religious scholars have consistently rejected such control and demanded the independence of religious affairs, keeping them free from interference by secular political authorities. They have also opposed the use of endowments to serve government policies, preferences, and dictates.

Religious endowments are an extremely sensitive matter in Islamic jurisprudence and must not be viewed superficially. First and foremost, they are connected to the houses of Almighty God, as all mosques are religious endowments. We are not speaking here of private or public property, but of property governed by specific religious rules established by Almighty God, which cannot be changed, altered, or politicized under any circumstances.

Mosques belong to God alone, and everything that takes place within them must be governed solely by His laws. This is the essence of the issue, making it an extremely sensitive matter that must remain entirely separate from politics and other considerations.

The same applies to mourning halls and the religious rituals and activities held within them. All must be governed solely by the laws of Almighty God, who has no partner.

It is in this context that we understand the words of His Eminence Ayatollah Sheikh Isa Ahmed Qassim:

"The collective answer of the believers, and the answer of each individual among them to all these decisions, is one and the same: the declaration of God's oneness, 'There is no god but God.' This expresses their vehement opposition to these decisions and the profound, irreconcilable conflict between them and the principle of divine oneness, which cannot be broken or defeated."

The imam who leads congregational prayers, the Friday sermon, and the discourse delivered in mosques, as well as the preacher in a mourning hall, the subjects he addresses, and all activities held there, are governed by the conditions of the religious endowment established under Almighty God's law. That law regulates every detail, great and small, without exception.

Some mourning halls, for example, have been endowed specifically for activities designated by the person who established the endowment. Even the highest religious authority among us has no right to go beyond those stipulated activities, let alone allow an administrative body or government ministry to interfere with them.

This matter is not about political disputes. For us, it is a question of religion and faith. The authorities place us in an extremely difficult position when they compel us to violate our religion, our school of thought, and what Almighty God has prescribed in our beliefs.

We cannot accept having our faith trampled upon, abandon the declaration of God's oneness, or forsake the pleasure of the Creator to seek the approval of His creation. Nor can religious scholars abandon their religious duty to preserve the trust of religion and protect Islamic law from distortion and falsification in the service of the political desires of one ruler or another.

The government may officially register endowed land and undertake similar purely administrative procedures that fall within the state's normal responsibilities.

But appointing and dismissing mosque imams, dictating what preachers may or may not say, appointing and removing endowment trustees, permitting or prohibiting prayers, and opening or closing mourning halls are entirely different matters. The same applies to authorizing or banning Husseini religious rituals, turning religious scholars into government employees, permitting or preventing authorized religious representatives from collecting khums (the religious one-fifth levy), and granting or withdrawing licenses for religious education in seminaries and elsewhere.

None of this has anything to do with government administrative regulation. It is blatant political domination and absolute, all-encompassing control. There is no other name for it.

Such practices are entirely contrary to religious teachings and the country's constitutional provisions. They amount to a complete denial of religious freedom and the total abolition of customs that have prevailed in Bahrain for hundreds of years, long before the establishment of the current political system.

Moreover, the demand for the independence of Ja'fari endowments is not a recent demand arising from contemporary political disputes. The history of religious endowments in Bahrain itself demonstrates that their administration was closely connected to members of the religious community, its scholars, and its trustees.

Historical documents indicate that Shia endowments were initially administered by Shia judges and trustees. Their administration was subsequently entrusted to a council elected by Shia residents of cities and villages, an arrangement that enjoyed social acceptance at the time.

In the 1920s, the prominent scholar Sayed Adnan al-Mousawi also undertook a survey of religious endowments, recording the names of those who established them, their trustees, their beneficiaries, and the purposes for which their funds were to be spent.

His intention was not to establish government ownership over these endowments, but to preserve the wishes of their founders and protect the endowments from loss and encroachment. The historical foundation of the institution was therefore preservation, not the seizure of endowment property or control over its trusteeship.

Here, we must return to a fundamental principle of Islamic jurisprudence that is often lost amid the language of modern administration: an endowment is not property owned by the institution that manages it, and a trustee is not an employee whose position is created at the administration's discretion.

Rather, it is the founder who establishes the endowment and determines its purpose. The founder may also designate its trustee and specify how trusteeship is to pass to another person. If the trustee is no longer available, the matter reverts to the competent religious authority.

The founder's conditions, within the limits of Islamic law, are not merely moral recommendations that may be overridden by an administrative decision. They form an integral part of the nature and legal provisions of the religious endowment.

Changing the authority responsible for administering an endowment, obstructing its intended purpose, or preventing the institution benefiting from it from fulfilling the function for which the endowment was established therefore undermines the very foundation of the endowment.

Historical endowment deeds themselves demonstrate the importance attached to trusteeship.

In one old endowment deed established by the Bahraini scholar Sayed Majid bin Hashim, responsibility for supervising the endowment was assigned through a succession of designated trustees. The deed also specified the authority to which trusteeship would pass if the appointed trustee was no longer available.

It even stipulated:

"No lower-ranking person may exercise authority while a higher-ranking person is present, nor shall authority pass to the next in line while the designated trustee remains."

The significance is clear: who administers an endowment is not a question whose answer is left to the political authorities of each era. Rather, it is an essential part of the endowment deed and the wishes of its founder, which, in Islamic jurisprudence, constitute binding religious provisions that cannot be altered under any circumstances.

The role of the authorities, in principle, is simply to protect those wishes from being disregarded or violated.

The worst thing that can happen to religious endowments is for property dedicated by a believer to preserving religion and its rituals to become a tool used to restrict that very religion and those rituals.

A person who establishes a mosque or mourning hall, or allocates funds for religious education, does not intend to grant political authorities the right to determine what may be said from its pulpit or what activities may take place within the endowment.

Rather, the intention is to establish an ongoing charitable endowment governed by Islamic law, its provisions and objectives, and a specific purpose.

Defending the independence of religious endowments is therefore not a struggle over property or an administrative position. It is a defense of a sacred trust.

This is the most serious aspect of the matter. An endowment is a trust, and how grave that trust becomes when it concerns one of the houses of Almighty God or a religious ritual.

Religious endowments are a trust placed upon the shoulders of believers, and Almighty God will hold them accountable if they fail to fulfil that trust. God Himself, in His greatness, has commanded that trusts be fulfilled, precisely because of the gravity of the matter. As Almighty God says:

"Indeed, Allah commands you to render trusts to whom they are due."

Beyond faithfulness to a trust lies only betrayal. The people of Bahrain cannot betray Almighty God, their religion, or their Quran by handing over their religious endowments and all their religious affairs to untrustworthy hands.

This is the true nature of the issue that drives religious scholars and believers to resist so determinedly when it comes to religious endowments, the rules governing them, and the unjust political decisions made in this context.

In conclusion, I would like to thank those responsible for the Rights Under Attack bulletin, particularly the esteemed Mr. Baqer Mohammed Jawad Darwish, for the valuable information and historical documents he provided, which I have included in this article.

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What Comes After the Trial of Religious Scholars? The Future of Relations Between the State and the Shia Community in Bahrain

Fouad Ibrahim — Saudi Researcher and Political Activist



Political trials do not end with the issuance of judicial rulings. Some rulings have consequences that extend beyond the fate of those forcibly detained, becoming part of a community's collective memory, reshaping its relationship with the state and its institutions, and leaving effects that are difficult to erase for decades. These consequences become more complex when a trial involves religious figures or institutions that hold symbolic significance within a community defined by a particular sectarian background. For segments of that community, the issue is no longer simply a legal dispute between the state and detained individuals. Instead, it becomes a question of the limits of recognition of religious identity, the place of religious institutions in public life, and the extent to which the state is prepared to treat the Shia community as the majority and an integral component of the national fabric.

In Bahrain, this question cannot be separated from the long history of relations between the state and the Shia community, particularly the changes that followed the protests of February 2011. Since then, relations between the authorities and broad segments of the Shia community have faced successive tests. Security considerations have become intertwined with political divisions and sectarian identities, while demands for political reform have intersected with issues of representation, religious rights, and trust in institutions.

The most important question raised by the trial, therefore, concerns not only what the court decides but also what remains within society after the ruling is issued. Can the state maintain the legitimacy of the judiciary in the eyes of a community that feels its religious institutions have become subject to security scrutiny? And can a trial achieve its immediate legal objective while producing a broader and more enduring crisis of trust?

Answering these questions requires examining five interconnected dimensions of the potential consequences.



First: From a Legal Dispute to a Crisis of Trust in the State

Political trust is not simply a matter of citizens accepting government decisions. Rather, it rests on their belief that state institutions deal with them according to general rules, that the law does not change depending on political or religious affiliation, and that the judiciary is capable of distinguishing individual responsibility from collective identity. When a religious community comes to believe that the trial of some of its prominent figures is aimed at the religious structure to which they belong, the potential damage is not limited to its reaction to the ruling. It extends to the community's perception of the nature of the state itself.

This marks a significant shift. Rather than seeing the state as a common framework to which different groups can turn to resolve their disputes, the community may increasingly come to see it as a party to the conflict. And rather than viewing the judiciary as a means of settling disputes, the ruling may become, in the collective consciousness, further evidence of the imbalance in relations between the authorities and the community.

In Bahrain, this issue is particularly sensitive because of the political and security legacy accumulated since 2011, and even before that, through long decades of deprivation and marginalization. The report of the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry, published in November 2011, revealed the extent of the violations that accompanied the crisis, including arbitrary arrests, ill-treatment, and torture in cases documented by the commission. The report itself became a key reference in debates over accountability and institutional reform.

Any new trial that raises concerns relating to sectarian identity therefore does not take place in a vacuum. It enters a social environment burdened by past experiences and questions about the seriousness of the Al Khalifa authorities in addressing the problems responsible for producing successive crises.

The authorities' continued insistence on ignoring the structural crises that have accompanied the formation of the state in Bahrain from the outset has made a crisis of trust a defining feature of relations between the Shia community and the Al Khalifa authorities. An inherited collective conviction has taken hold, passed down through generations as an established explanation of the state's relationship with the Shia community.



Second: The Religious Establishment Between Independence and Co-optation

The Shia religious establishment in Bahrain holds a position that cannot be reduced to preaching and religious guidance. It performs roles connected with religious education, rituals, religious endowments, charitable work, social solidarity, and the preservation of collective memory. At different historical stages, it has served as one of the frameworks through which segments of the community have reorganized their relationship with themselves and with the public sphere.

This distinctive position means that any judicial confrontation involving religious figures or institutions has consequences extending beyond those directly involved in the case.
If the belief takes hold that the independence of the religious establishment is under threat, different responses may emerge within the community. Some religious scholars may prefer to avoid confrontation with the authorities and maintain a minimum level of religious activity. Others may believe that retreat would open the door to further interference in sectarian affairs. A third group may seek to redefine its role outside official institutions or established organizational frameworks.
A trial perceived as an attack on the religious structure may thus confront all these different currents with a common question: Where does the state's regulatory authority end, and where does the community's right to manage its own religious affairs begin?
The significance of this question extends beyond institutional independence to the nature of relations between the authorities and religious leadership. A state that seeks to subject the religious sphere to strict security or administrative oversight risks pushing the Shia religious establishment, across all its different currents, to unite against any measures by the authorities that target the Shia presence.
This reveals an important political paradox: Weakening independent religious institutions does not necessarily weaken religious devotion or religious loyalty. Instead, it may shift trust away from visible institutions with which dialogue is possible and toward less visible social networks that are harder for the state to engage with.
In a society where religious activity is closely linked to everyday social life, such changes can have far-reaching consequences.



Third: Younger Generations and the Formation of a Collective Memory of Grievance

Perhaps the trial's most profound impact will concern generations that did not experience the events of 2011 as a direct political experience but grew up in the shadow of their consequences.
Those who were children during the protests are now better able to form their own political and religious views. For them, perceptions of the state are shaped not only by official discourse but also by family accounts, experiences at school and in society, digital social media, and shared memories of arrests, trials, and political conflicts.

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When a new trial involves religious figures and the Shia religious establishment, which holds a special place in society, it becomes another link in a chain of events perceived as an ongoing pattern rather than isolated incidents.
The significance of this process lies in what political sociology calls the transmission of collective memory across generations. Individuals do not need to have experienced an event themselves for it to become part of their political identity. It is enough for them to hear accounts of it within their families or communities and to encounter developments in the present that seem to confirm those accounts.
Such experiences may prompt some young people to rise up again and demand fundamental legal and constitutional changes that guarantee equality and freedoms. For another segment, they may lead to greater alienation from official institutions, declining faith in the value of reforms, and demands for the overthrow of the regime itself, after its repeated promises of reform have gone unfulfilled.
If young people have access to effective representative institutions, safe spaces for expression, and reliable mechanisms for seeking redress, many of the effects of this discontent can be contained. But if judicial rulings are accompanied by continued restrictions on participation and expression, the conviction that peaceful and institutional avenues are incapable of bringing about change may grow stronger.
The political cost remains when generations grow up viewing their relationship with the state through experiences of exclusion rather than citizenship.

Fourth: The Judiciary Between Legal and Social Legitimacy

The judiciary is supposed to be the institution to which citizens can turn when their interests conflict with those of the executive branch or other citizens. Trust in judicial independence is therefore one of the most important foundations of political stability.
Cases involving religious affiliation, however, subject the judiciary to a double test. On the one hand, it must apply the law on the basis of evidence and individual responsibility. On the other, it must demonstrate its independence from the political and sectarian conflicts surrounding the case.
Compliance with formal legal procedures is not enough unless the rights of the defense are guaranteed, the evidence is open to scrutiny, the charges are clearly defined, the reasons for the ruling are made public in a way that allows them to be assessed, and avenues of appeal are available and effective.
The wider the gap between the official judicial account and society's perception of the case, the more difficult it becomes to restore trust.
The politicization of the judiciary in Bahrain has become part of the crisis of trust between the Shia community and the state. The judicial establishment bears a significant share of the legal, moral, and national responsibility for the oppressive rulings issued against religious scholars and, indeed, political detainees.
The real test lies in the judiciary's ability to convince the different parties that it is not putting an identity on trial, punishing people for their affiliation, or allowing responsibility to shift from individuals to the community as a whole.
The judiciary does not operate in a social vacuum. Its public image is shaped by the accumulation of its practices, not by the wording of a single ruling.



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Fifth: From the Sectarian Question to the Question of Citizenship

The most dangerous consequence of the trial may be to reinforce the perception that the state represents only one segment of the population rather than all its communities, and that it has become a force that produces separation and division rather than unity and harmony. In other words, when the state loses its national character and becomes, in practice, merely a sectarian authority, it ceases to be a representative state, one capable of representing all segments of the population.

The broader issue is not whether the state has the authority to prosecute individuals, since this is one of its inherent powers. Rather, it is how that authority is exercised, with what safeguards, within what limits, and with what consequences for the principle of equal citizenship. The strength of a modern state is measured not only by its ability to enforce the law but also by its ability to ensure that different communities see the law as a source of shared protection, rather than a tool that can be used against their distinct religious or cultural identities.

In Bahrain, this principle carries particular significance because of the historical overlap between political representation and sectarian affiliation. The more that demands for rights or institutional disputes are dealt with through sectarian classifications, the harder it becomes to build a shared national public sphere.

Rebuilding trust, therefore, cannot be achieved simply by calling for national unity, however important such appeals may be. It requires policies and practices that make equality something that can be tested in everyday life: in the judiciary, public administration, religious rights, political participation, and the ability to express dissent peacefully.

Sixth: Can the State Recover What the Trial May Cost It?

Comparative experiences suggest that efforts to resolve crises involving religious identity rarely succeed when attention is limited to bringing legal proceedings to a close without addressing the underlying causes of the loss of trust that those proceedings have exposed.

It may be possible to reduce the negative consequences by guaranteeing fair trials, providing for independent judicial review, refraining from portraying accusations against individuals as characteristics of an entire sectarian community, and opening serious channels of dialogue concerning the independence and rights of religious institutions.

Overcoming the crisis of trust requires recognizing the Shia community as the largest segment of the population and, accordingly, adopting a national integration plan commensurate with its representative weight and demographic size.

Conclusion: The Verdict That Ends, and the Impact That Remains

A trial ends with a judicial ruling, and its procedural files are closed. But this does not necessarily mean that the case has come to an end socially or politically. Some trials end in the court records only to begin in society's collective memory.

When a substantial segment of society feels that a trial has targeted not only individuals but also figures or institutions that represent part of its identity, its impact may endure for a long time, even if the official account differs from that perception.

In Bahrain, where not all chapters of the crisis that deepened in 2011 have yet been closed, the responsibility is all the greater. The issue is not simply preserving the standing of the judiciary or the authority of the state, but preserving the possibility that citizens, regardless of their affiliations, can see the state as a shared political home and the judiciary as a refuge for the protection of rights rather than an extension of disputes.

The authorities may be able to bring a case to a close, but they cannot, through a judicial ruling alone, erase the memory that the case creates. They can enforce compliance with the law, but they cannot compel trust, because trust is built through a sustained record of justice, tangible equality, and mutual recognition.

The most important question after the rulings are issued will not be: Who won the case and who lost? Rather, it will be: Has the distance between the state and the Shia community narrowed or widened? Has the judiciary emerged from this experience better able to convince citizens of its impartiality, or has it become part of a collective memory that the future will need to overcome?

Judicial rulings are measured by the strength of their legal arguments, but their historical consequences are measured by what they leave behind in the relationship between society and the state. This may be the most difficult test posed by the trial in Bahrain.

The trial of religious scholars drives a wedge not only between Bahrain's Shia majority and the ruling authorities, further undermining trust, but also destroys what could serve as the foundation for building a stable relationship based on mutual rights and responsibilities, equality, and justice.

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I Know What It Means to Be Tried for Your Views: From Ben Ali's Prisons to the Trial of Bahrain's Religious Scholars



Zouhair Makhlouf
Former Member of the Tunisian Parliament

I never expected, when I was following news of political detainees in Tunisia and documenting testimonies from their families, that one day I too would find myself behind bars because of a journalistic investigation into environmental pollution.

Nor did I imagine that filming the difficult working conditions of laborers in an industrial area of Nabeul would lead to my trial and imprisonment. Yet that is exactly what happened in Tunisia in 2009, under the rule of Zine El Abidine Ben Ali.

I had experienced arrest many years before that. I had known imprisonment and persecution in the late 1980s and throughout the 1990s, and had participated in human rights work defending political prisoners and their families. I had also helped establish human rights organizations and contributed to media efforts to report what was happening behind prison walls, at a time when the authorities regarded the exposure of violations as a threat.

Independent journalism was itself a battle. The camera you carried to document an injustice could, in the hands of interrogators, become evidence against you.

In October 2009, I was arrested over a video investigation into pollution and working conditions in the industrial area of Nabeul. I found myself before a court facing charges of harming others through communications networks.

I was not carrying a weapon, nor was I calling for violence. I was doing journalistic work that exposed a problem affecting citizens.

Yet I ended up in prison.

That experience was not merely a dispute between a journalist and a political authority. It was a harsh lesson in how legal provisions can be used to turn someone demanding their rights into a defendant.

Even more painful was learning what it means to be assaulted in front of one's family. In April 2010, I was beaten by security officers in front of my wife and children after asking to see my arrest warrant. In December of the same year, I was assaulted again while preparing to cover events in Sidi Bouzid.

This is why I cannot read news of the trial of Shia religious scholars in Bahrain today with the detachment of someone who has never experienced arrest or witnessed how the authorities can extend their reach beyond a person's body to affect their family, dignity, and future.



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The Trial of Dozens of Religious Scholars

Since May 2026, Bahrain has witnessed a campaign of arrests and prosecutions targeting dozens of Shia religious scholars. This was followed by a series of criminal trials involving more than 40 defendants in interconnected cases. The authorities brought serious charges against them relating to the establishment of a banned group, foreign connections, and financial, organizational, and religious activities.
What concerns me about this case is not merely the number of detainees or the nature of the charges, but what Bahraini human rights organizations have reported about the conditions of interrogation and trial. The Bahrain Forum for Human Rights documented accounts concerning restrictions on defendants' communication with their lawyers, difficulties faced by the defense in obtaining case documents, and allegations of coercion and ill-treatment.
The Forum also reported that the defendants participated in court hearings via video link from their places of detention and that attendance at some hearings was restricted to the parties involved in the proceedings.
In August 2026, the Forum published information about a hearing that lasted more than thirteen hours, raising questions about the conditions under which witnesses were heard and the integrity of the proceedings.
These allegations and human rights concerns require an independent international investigation. They must not be treated as judicially established facts. However, the greater mistake would be to dismiss them as details that can be ignored simply because the case has been classified as a security matter and is supported by state-controlled media.
My experience has taught me that a fair trial is measured not only by what the law says about defendants' rights, but also by what defendants can actually exercise in practice.
What value is the right to a defense if a lawyer is not given sufficient time and facilities to examine the evidence? What value is a defendant's presence if they cannot speak freely or clearly hear and follow the proceedings? And what value is a public trial if people learn the details of the charges through the press but cannot observe how those charges are examined in court?

I Know the Dangers of Trials Held Behind Closed Doors

In November 2009, when I was appearing before a Tunisian court, Amnesty International documented the exclusion of journalists and human rights defenders from the courtroom where my case was being heard.
I therefore know what it means for a defendant to remain inside the courtroom while those who could observe the proceedings are kept outside.
The presence of a journalist or human rights observer is not a luxury. It is part of the protection a person needs when facing the power of the prosecution.
The authorities possess investigative agencies, official documents, and the ability to publicize their version of events, while the victim needs safeguards to ensure that they do not become the weaker party in an unequal struggle.
This is why I am troubled when I read about the restrictions imposed during the trial hearings of religious scholars in Bahrain.

Do Not Turn Religious Affiliation into Evidence of Guilt

There is another aspect of the trial of Bahrain's religious scholars that deserves a clear human rights position. Official statements and human rights reports have sparked debate over the inclusion of matters such as jurisprudential opinions, religious authorities, khums (the religious one-fifth levy), and religious seminaries in the context in which the charges are presented.
Here, the principle must be unequivocal.
Belief in a jurisprudential or political opinion may be discussed, criticized, or disputed. But it does not constitute a crime. Affiliation with a religious authority, the teaching of Islamic jurisprudence, and the practice of religious rituals are rights that must be protected under the constitution and established customs.
In Tunisia before the revolution, we experienced the consequences of the authorities using people's beliefs and religious and political affiliations as grounds for security suspicion.
At times, merely being classified as belonging to a particular intellectual or political movement was enough to expose someone to surveillance and restrictions.
I therefore understand the danger when affiliation takes precedence over conduct and classification comes before evidence. Criminal law must not become a tribunal for judging ideas, and judges are not responsible for determining the validity of religious interpretations.
Religious scholars should not be required to change their beliefs to receive the protection of the law. Nor does the state have the right to impose a single interpretation of Islamic jurisprudence on citizens and then treat those who disagree with it as suspects.
Freedom of belief loses its meaning if it protects only what the authorities approve.

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Torture Is Not a Minor Detail in a Case File

What concerns me most in the reports about the trial of religious scholars is the allegations of ill-treatment and coercion during interrogation.
Such complaints must not be ignored or left without a serious, independent investigation.
In Tunisia, I experienced what it means to be detained while feeling that your voice cannot reach anyone and that your account of the treatment you endured carries less weight than the official version of events.
The lesson I learned from those years is that justice begins with recognizing a detainee's right to file a complaint, protecting them from retaliation, and independently investigating their allegations.
It is not enough for a court merely to record a torture complaint in its proceedings. The complaint must be examined, the relevant evidence verified, and any statement proven to have been obtained through torture or coercion excluded in accordance with the law.
A confession must not become more important than the manner in which it was obtained.
If a person's free will is compromised, confidence in their confession is undermined. And if allegations of torture are neglected, the problem goes far beyond a minor procedural flaw, because it affects both the reliability of the evidence and human dignity.

Behind Every Detainee Is a Family

When I read about the restrictions that human rights organizations say some Bahraini religious scholars have faced in communicating with their families and lawyers, I am reminded that detention does not affect just one person.
It affects an entire household. Children waiting for their father to return do not read the provisions of criminal procedure laws.
My family experienced the cost of security-related persecution in Tunisia. I therefore do not regard the suffering of detainees' families in Bahrain as an emotional element added to an article, but as an essential part of the impact of security and judicial measures on people's lives.
A law intended to protect society must also protect individuals from unnecessary humiliation and preserve their families' right to communication and reassurance, subject to legitimate and clearly defined restrictions.
A trial must not become a punishment that extends to family members.

We Do Not Need to Agree to Defend One Another

Someone might ask me: What does a Tunisian human rights defender have in common with religious scholars in Bahrain?
My answer is simple.
What unites us is the right that every human being should enjoy, regardless of religious affiliation or political position.
We are also united by our commitment to a universal human rights framework that allows every person on earth to defend another person subjected to a violation, an unfair trial, or an unjust arrest.
When I was detained in Tunisia, I did not need others to adopt my views in order to defend my right to freedom and a fair trial.
I needed people who believed that imprisoning a journalist for doing his job, beating him because of his activities, and preventing him from defending himself were actions that could not be justified by political disagreement. Nor should such actions take place without even the most basic constitutional and legal procedures being followed, let alone in violation of international conventions and covenants to which the state has committed itself.
Today, I believe the same principle should apply to Bahrain's religious scholars.
If criminal charges are brought against them, they must be examined by an independent judiciary in a fair and public trial. Their lawyers must be allowed to examine and challenge the evidence, and allegations of torture must be investigated independently.
At the same time, I reaffirm the religious scholars' right to immediate and unconditional release and my conviction that this trial is malicious.

So That What We Experienced Is Not Repeated

Before the fall of Ben Ali's regime, I believed that exposing violations was a duty, even when speaking out came at a high cost.
Imprisonment could not turn a journalistic investigation into pollution into a genuine crime. Nor could beatings, torture, or abuse erase a person's right to freedom of expression.
I know what it means to stand before a court because of what you have said, written, or believed.
And I also know that the first step toward justice begins when we refuse to allow the same thing to happen to anyone else.
Do not turn beliefs into crimes

Do not allow trials to be conducted through media outlets controlled by an authority that falsifies facts to mislead the public and influence the course of investigations and even the most basic legal procedures.
Do not allow detention to become a punishment imposed before a verdict.
Do not allow investigations to take place behind closed doors, using pressure and torture prohibited under constitutional and international law.
Bring detainees before an independent and impartial judiciary, rather than one appointed by an executive authority that retaliates against its opponents by using an instrument it controls through appointments, pressure, and unjust domestic laws.
Allow defense lawyers to represent their clients and attend interrogations with them, in accordance with the requirements of international conventions and human rights instruments.
The judiciary must refuse to decide cases in which defendants have been subjected to torture. Evidence that they were tortured must be regarded as an indication that their confessions, submitted in the court's case files, were obtained under clear pressure. This calls into question the validity and fairness of their trial, both in substance and in procedure.
Release the detained religious scholars and all prisoners of conscience in Bahrain.

> **“I know what it means to stand before a court because of what you have said, written, or believed. And I also know that the first step toward justice begins when we refuse to allow the same thing to happen to anyone else.”**



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Behind Every Detainee, a Family Left Waiting: Testimonies from the Families of Religious Scholars in Bahrain



Ebtisam Al-Saegh
Monitoring and Documentation Officer at SALAM for Democracy and Human Rights

For the families of religious scholars in Bahrain, the arrests were far from an isolated experience. Rather, they were part of a series of pressures and fears that, in several cases, began even before the arrests, amid escalating media attacks, incitement, and defamation. These continued through the raids, searches, and arrests, followed by periods of enforced disappearance, detention, interrogation, and trial. These developments left families gripped by fear, panic, and anxiety over the fate and safety of their detained relatives, particularly amid reports of raids, confiscation of property, and prolonged loss of contact with some detainees, lasting nearly 90 days in certain cases.

Through the numerous interviews we conducted with the families of detained religious scholars, we listened to their experiences and what they had endured since the first days of the arrests. We found that their suffering was not simply about the absence of a father, husband, or other family member. It was also about the fear of the unknown, uncertainty over the location and conditions of detention, and anxiety about possible torture or ill-treatment, as well as the psychological, social, and economic burdens resulting from these measures.

The arrests came at a time when families' fears were already heightened. Not much time had passed since Sayed Mohammed al-Mousawi was killed under severe torture, with serious injuries visible on his body associated with torture and ill-treatment. His death revived families' fears of enforced disappearance and torture, prompting them to question what the detainees might face, particularly during the first days when all contact with them had been cut off.

The anxiety was not merely about the arrests themselves, but also about how they were carried out in several cases. Families reported that raids and searches took place without clear judicial warrants being presented or sufficient information being provided about the authorities carrying out the arrests and the reasons for these actions. They also described the use of insults, humiliation, degrading language, and threats, including threats directed at religious scholars and their family members.



In some cases, only women were present in the homes when the raids took place. They suddenly found themselves facing searches and arrests, accompanied by fear and confusion. According to their accounts, the items confiscated were not limited to the detainees' property but also included belongings of other family members, such as books, electronic devices, and personal items.
The moment of arrest thus became a distressing experience whose impact extended to wives, children, and parents. They were left with questions they could not answer: Where had he been taken? Which authority was responsible for his detention? Was he safe? Would he receive his medication? And would they be able to check on his well-being?
These testimonies raise questions about compliance with legal safeguards relating to liberty and personal security. Article 9 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights prohibits arbitrary arrest or detention. It requires that individuals be informed of the reasons for their arrest and promptly notified of the charges against them. It also guarantees their right to challenge the lawfulness of their detention before a court. Article 17 of the same Covenant protects individuals against arbitrary or unlawful interference with their privacy, family, home, and correspondence. Bahrain has been a party to the Covenant since acceding to it on September 20, 2006, under Law No. 56.

The Impact of Arrests on Families and Society

These concerns are heightened by the social standing of many of the detained scholars. Beyond their religious and jurisprudential roles, they are members of neighborhoods and communities where people have known them closely and maintained ties with them through different circumstances, from occasions of celebration and mourning to times of crisis and everyday needs. They were present in people's lives, listening to their problems and sharing their joys and sorrows. Their absence from their families and communities was therefore not merely a family matter, but an event with wider social consequences.
These scholars are not figures detached from the social fabric. Many grew up among the people in their communities, shared in their daily lives, and played religious and social roles in the neighborhoods and areas to which they belonged. The impact of their arrests on society was therefore also tied to the loss of individuals whose presence people had come to expect at various occasions and in different circumstances.
Nevertheless, the families bore the most immediate consequences of the arrests. Children who were accustomed to having their fathers with them could never have imagined seeing them taken away in such a manner, particularly when their fathers were individuals known and respected in the community.
The psychological impact also extended to children who, according to their families, faced additional pressure because of insulting language, accusations, and derogatory descriptions published or circulated about their fathers. These included attempts to discredit them, accuse them of disloyalty, and level allegations of moral or financial misconduct against them.
The effects of such degrading rhetoric directed at children's fathers should therefore not be dismissed as mere media disputes, particularly when it reaches their children and affects their sense of security and their families' dignity.

Loss of Contact and Concerns About Health

The loss of contact with detainees for periods approaching 90 days in some cases was among the greatest burdens on families, as they lacked sufficient information about their relatives' places of detention, health, and living conditions. Their concerns were heightened because several detainees were elderly, some suffered from chronic illnesses or required regular medication, while others needed prescription glasses, crutches, or other medical aids related to their health conditions.
During that period, the families' demands went no further than the most basic human needs: knowing that their detained relatives were taking their medication, receiving food and water, sleeping in suitable conditions, and being able to bathe, change their clothes, and practice their religious rituals. Above all, they sought guarantees that their loved ones would not be subjected to torture or ill-treatment.
We documented accounts indicating that some detainees had to wait several days to receive clothes their families had already handed over to the relevant authorities. Families also reported repeated attempts to deliver prescription glasses and essential medical supplies that some detainees could not do without. Their concerns also extended to items needed for religious practices, including books, religious materials, and personal belongings.
These details may seem minor to outsiders, but for a family unaware of the condition of its breadwinner or father, they are a source of daily anxiety. Families are not simply asking where their relatives are being held. They also want to know whether their fathers can move around, whether they have received their medication, and whether their health allows them to endure the conditions of detention.

The loss of contact takes on particular legal significance in light of Article 10 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which requires that all persons deprived of their liberty be treated with humanity and respect for the inherent dignity of the human person. Article 7 of the same Covenant also provides protection against torture and other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment.
The Convention against Torture, to which Bahrain acceded on March 6, 1998, prohibits torture absolutely. Article 2 requires states to take effective measures to prevent torture, while Articles 12 and 13 require prompt and impartial investigations into allegations of torture and guarantee the right to lodge complaints and have them examined without intimidation. Article 16 also requires states to prevent cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment that does not amount to torture.
Loss of contact alone does not establish that torture or enforced disappearance has occurred. However, when accompanied by uncertainty about a detainee's whereabouts or an inability to verify their safety, it raises serious concerns that require disclosure of their location, guarantees of communication with them, and investigation of any allegations of ill-treatment.

The Case of Sayed Majeed al-Mashaal: Growing Health Concerns

One case that illustrates the extent of the anxiety experienced by families is that of Sayed Majeed al-Mashaal, head of the Islamic Scholars Council. His family reported that he was recovering from a complex surgical procedure that required rest, medical care, wound monitoring, painkillers, and other medication necessary for his condition.
According to the accounts we documented, attempts were made to arrest him while he was in hospital and again upon his discharge, despite his health condition. His family was also concerned about his ability to endure the arrest procedures, transportation, and detention while he still needed medical care and rest.
The family further reported that his home was raided on the day of the religious scholars' arrests and that money and property were confiscated, including, according to the family, some belongings owned by other family members.
The family's concern was not simply about the absence of a well-known community figure. It centered on a basic human concern: How could someone who had recently undergone surgery and had a wound requiring care receive the medical attention his condition demanded? And would his health needs be taken into account during transportation and detention?

Confiscation of Money and Property and Its Consequences

Another issue that emerged during our interviews with some families was the confiscation of money and property. Families reported that confiscations were not limited to money or belongings owned by the detained religious scholar. In some cases, they also extended to money and property belonging to other family members.
As a result, according to some families' accounts, households were left without sufficient funds to meet their daily needs, particularly when the confiscated money had been the main source of funds for household expenses. The confiscations, according to the testimonies, were not limited to money but also included books, electronic devices, and personal belongings.
Any confiscation of money or property must have a clear legal basis and be limited in scope and proportionate to its legitimate purpose. A distinction must also be made between property belonging to the person subject to the measure and property belonging to family members who have no connection to the accusations.
Property owners must also be informed of the reasons for confiscation, the authority that issued the decision, and the procedures available to challenge it and recover any property for which there is no legal basis for continued seizure.

Trials and Defense Safeguards

The families' concerns did not end with the arrests and conditions of detention. They also extended to the judicial proceedings and concerns about fair trial guarantees. Families reported that defense lawyers had encountered difficulties obtaining full access to case files, had been given limited time to review investigation documents, and had not been allowed to obtain complete copies of the files. These restrictions raised questions about the defense team's ability to examine the evidence and charges and prepare an effective defense.
According to accounts relayed by their families, some religious scholars said that their interrogations had been brief or limited to a few questions, while their case files contained numerous documents and interrogation records. If confirmed, this discrepancy would require clarification of how the interrogation records were prepared, whether they accurately reflected what had taken place, and whether defendants and their lawyers had been given access to the evidence and materials on which the charges were based.

Article 14 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights guarantees the right to a fair trial before a competent, independent, and impartial tribunal. It also provides defense safeguards, including adequate time and facilities to prepare a defense, communication with a lawyer of the defendant's choosing, and the right to examine prosecution witnesses. Article 14(2) further affirms the presumption of innocence, which requires that defendants be treated as innocent until proven guilty according to law.
The families' concerns were heightened by the fact that court hearings were not open to the public, while some details of the case and the charges were being circulated in the media. Article 14(1) of the Covenant guarantees the principle of public hearings, subject to specific and justified exceptions, while requiring that judgments generally be made public. Accordingly, any decision to exclude the public should be based on specific legal grounds and must not undermine public oversight of the administration of justice or weaken defense safeguards.
The accusations and insulting language about their fathers that reach the children further increase their psychological burden. They also extend the impact of the case beyond the courtroom, affecting families' daily lives, dignity, and sense of security.

Patience and Family Visits Amid Continuing Anxiety

Despite all these concerns, we witnessed a strong sense of faith, patience, and acceptance of God's will among many families. They repeatedly expressed their trust in God and their conviction that everything happens with His knowledge and that relief remains possible, however long the wait. They also believed that their relatives' experiences were not separate from the suffering of other families who had endured arrests and the deprivation of contact with loved ones.
Yet faith and patience do not mean the absence of fear, nor should they be understood as acceptance of suffering or a surrender of rights. Behind every expression of patience is a mother waiting for news, a wife wondering about her husband's health, a child missing his father, and a family trying to find out whether their loved one has received his medication, been able to sleep or change his clothes, and is safe from any ill-treatment.
During the visits that families were able to secure, which some described as limited since the arrests, seeing their detained relatives provided a significant morale boost for both sides. Families described returning from visits feeling somewhat reassured after witnessing the detainees' continued faith, steadfastness, and belief in their innocence. However, this reassurance did not eliminate their ongoing concerns about detention conditions, health, and the possible outcomes of the judicial proceedings.
The transportation of detainees from their places of detention to visiting facilities also raises additional concerns, particularly in light of accounts of lengthy waiting periods, difficult transportation conditions, and seating arrangements unsuitable for elderly detainees or those with health problems. If these conditions are exhausting for some younger prisoners, their potential impact on elderly and ill detainees calls for a review of transportation arrangements to ensure that their health needs are taken into account.

Community Mobilization Amid Continuing Fears

Through our meetings with families and our monitoring of conditions in several areas, we observed a noticeable decline in community mobilization and activities compared with previous periods. This occurred amid reports from families of security harassment and fears about the consequences of participating in any activity or public action. This decline cannot be viewed separately from the broader climate surrounding the arrests and its impact on people's sense of security and their ability to express themselves and participate in public affairs.
However, this decline did not mean a complete absence of public engagement. We observed signs of renewed, albeit limited, activity in some areas, along with expressions of anger and public discontent over the arrests and trials of the religious scholars. Some residents expressed their views through meetings, initiatives, and local interactions. These reactions showed that the issue had extended beyond the detainees' families and become a source of concern for broader segments of society.
It is important here to distinguish between field observations and general impressions. These observations reflect what we witnessed during our meetings and monitoring activities and do not constitute a comprehensive statistical assessment of the level of community mobilization or trends in public opinion. Nevertheless, they suggest that fear of prosecution may limit public expression, while social discontent may persist through other means or resurface in certain areas.
Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights protects the right to freedom of opinion and expression, while Article 21 guarantees the right to peaceful assembly. Restrictions on the exercise of these rights may only be imposed under the conditions set out in the Covenant, for a legitimate purpose, and where they are necessary and proportionate to that purpose.

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Human Rights Demands to Protect Detainees and Their Families

What we have heard from families and documented through their testimonies places upon us a humanitarian and human rights responsibility to convey their suffering rather than reduce it to arrest figures or court hearings. Behind every detainee is a family living with the daily realities of their loved one's absence, and every measure taken can have consequences for family members' health and their psychological, social, and economic stability.

From this perspective, the responsibility of the relevant authorities goes beyond addressing the immediate consequences of arrest. It also involves ensuring respect for rights at every stage, from arrest and search procedures through detention and trial, through the following measures:

Disclosure of Places of Detention: Ensure that families and lawyers know where detainees are being held, enable regular communication with them, and protect them from enforced disappearance and incommunicado detention.

Ensuring Safety and Preventing Torture: Conduct prompt, independent, and impartial investigations into any allegations of torture, threats, humiliation, or ill-treatment, and ensure that detainees and their families are not subjected to intimidation for filing complaints.

Healthcare: Provide necessary medication, medical examinations, treatment, and medical supplies, while taking into account the needs of elderly and ill detainees and those recovering from surgery.

Respect for the Inviolability of Homes and Property: Clarify the legal basis for every arrest, search, or confiscation, and distinguish between property belonging to the person subject to the measure and that belonging to their family members. Guarantee the right of those affected to challenge such measures and recover their property when there is no legal basis for its continued seizure.

Guaranteeing Fair Trials: Ensure that lawyers have full and adequate access to case files and evidence, provide the time and facilities necessary to prepare a defense, and respect the presumption of innocence and the principle of public hearings in accordance with legal safeguards.

Protecting Children and Family Members: Take measures to protect detainees' children from insults, bullying, defamation, and psychological pressure, while respecting their best interests and their rights to protection and privacy.

Respect for Religious and Civil Rights and Freedoms: Ensure that detainees' right to practice their religious rituals is not infringed upon, and respect the rights to freedom of opinion, expression, and peaceful assembly in accordance with international obligations.

Respect for detainees' rights is inseparable from respect for the rights of their families, including their right to information, reassurance, communication, and dignity. Justice is measured not only by the judgments issued by courts but also by the extent to which the law and human rights are respected at every stage, from the moment of arrest until the conclusion of judicial proceedings.

Behind every detainee is a family waiting, children who need to feel safe, a wife worried about her husband's health and fate, and a father or mother waiting for news that will reassure them about their son. This suffering should not remain confined to private testimonies. It must be a matter of human rights concern and accountability, translated into practical safeguards that prevent violations from recurring and preserve human dignity and rights, regardless of a person's position or role in society.



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Behind Closed Doors

Families of Detained Religious Scholars Reveal What the Trial Records Leave Out

Mujtaba al-Mumin
Son of detained Sheikh Isa al-Mumin (imam of Al-Kheif Mosque in the Al-Dair area and former member of the Central Committee of the Islamic Scholars Council).

Fatima al-Mishal
Daughter of detained Sayed Majeed al-Mishal (head of the Islamic Scholars Council).

Sayed Yousif al-Muhafdha
Human rights adviser at SALAM for Democracy and Human Rights.

The Day of the Arrest: What Happened Behind Closed Doors at Home?



Part One | The Day of the Arrest: What Happened Behind Closed Doors at Home?

Question to Mujtaba al-Mumin
You say that Sheikh Isa al-Mumin was arrested on the morning of May 9 and that the individuals who entered the house did not identify which authority they represented or, according to your account, present a search warrant. What happened from the moment they knocked on the door until they took him away? What exactly was confiscated? Did the family receive an official record of the seized items? Has anything been returned so far?

Mujtaba al-Mumin: From the moment they entered the house, it was clear that they had been given specific instructions. They did not search the entire house. Instead, they asked to go directly to my father's study, which he uses to prepare sermons and Hussaini religious gatherings, and to his bedroom.
The search was limited to these two rooms. They confiscated some of my father's handwritten papers, particularly those relating to topics he discusses during Hussaini gatherings. They also seized all the cash from the bedroom. My mother even pleaded with them to leave some money for household expenses, but they refused.
They also confiscated photographs of the Shia community's religious authorities that were hanging on the walls, along with a laptop, a tablet, seven old mobile phones, and the phone my father was using.
They placed all the confiscated items in a large black bag and left the house with my father without giving us any receipt for what they had seized. Nothing has been returned so far.

Question to Fatima al-Mishal
In the case of Sayed Majeed al-Mishal, the events began while he was in a particularly vulnerable medical condition following surgery. How did the authorities deal with his health condition before detaining him? Did the family have medical reports clearly indicating that he needed time to recover or regular treatment? Were these reports presented to the authorities who summoned him?

Fatima al-Mishal: Yes, he underwent surgery to remove a tumour from his stomach that had caused severe bleeding and required urgent surgical intervention. After the operation, he was unable to eat or move and remained connected to medical equipment for several days.
On the second day, we were surprised when men in civilian clothes arrived to arrest him from his hospital bed over a tweet. However, the doctor prevented them from doing so, explaining that my father was under his care and that he was responsible for his health.
Security personnel remained stationed outside my father's hospital room throughout his week-long stay. When he was discharged, a riot police vehicle was waiting for him in the hospital car park. Once again, the intervention of the doctor and hospital management prevented his arrest.
The phone calls continued, and my father repeatedly explained that he could not move, had medical follow-up appointments, and would report to the authorities as soon as his condition improved.
However, a week after his discharge, he received a call from the Cybercrime Investigation Centre demanding that he appear immediately, without delay.
My father did not want security forces to raid our home and frighten the family, so he decided to go himself.
On Sunday, April 19, he went to the centre. An hour later, we received a call asking us to bring his mobile phone. He was then detained for three weeks and transferred to Dry Dock Detention Centre.
On May 9, at approximately 2:20 p.m., masked security forces surrounded and raided our home. Although we told them that my father had already been arrested and that only women were present in the house, they insisted on entering.
They searched through all the family's belongings and confiscated all the money in the house, without exception, including his daughter's Eid money. They also confiscated his daughter's iPad, which she relied on for her university studies and which contained her academic projects. The confiscation delayed her submission of these projects, particularly because her classes were being conducted remotely and she needed the device.
They also took my father's laptop, an old mobile phone, and several devices that were no longer working.

Part Two | After the Arrest

Question to Mujtaba al-Mumin
Eight days passed before Sheikh Isa made his first phone call. What did the family know about his whereabouts during that period? Which authorities did you contact to find out what had happened to him? When the first call came, what did you notice about his voice and the way he spoke? Was he able to speak freely about the conditions of his detention?

Mujtaba al-Mumin: In fact, this was the most difficult period for the family. We, the families of the detained religious scholars, had no idea where they were being held or under what conditions.
Although we had a lawyer, we received no information because the authorities had not informed him of anything either. Everything being circulated about their whereabouts and detention conditions was merely speculation.
The first phone call was suspiciously brief, probably lasting no more than three minutes. My mother did not have the opportunity to speak freely with my father.

During that short call, however, he told us that he was being held at the Criminal Investigations Directorate. That was the first time we learned where he was detained, but we received no further information.

Question to Fatima al-Mishal
You say that you lost contact with Sayed Majeed for approximately two weeks. What did you do during that period, and which official authorities did you approach? You also mentioned that some authorities claimed they did not know where he was being held. What responses did you receive from the Ombudsman's Office or the investigating authorities? Did you later receive any official explanation for the period during which communication was cut off?

Fatima al-Mishal: I went to Al-Khamis Police Station, Al-Adliya Police Station, and the investigation centre, but they all told me they had no information about my father's whereabouts.
I then approached the Ombudsman's Office, filed a complaint, and demanded that they disclose his whereabouts. They told me they would follow up on the matter and get back to me.
A week passed without anyone contacting me, so I returned to the Ombudsman's Office.
A few days later, my father called briefly. When I asked him where he was being held, he was unable to answer, and the call was cut off.

Part Three | Health and Medical Care in Detention

Question to Fatima al-Mishal
Your father had just undergone surgery to remove a tumour from his stomach. What medication and medical follow-up did he need when he was detained, and what care did he actually receive? You mentioned that the family tried to deliver medication but it was not accepted, and that, according to the family, the treatment he received was unsuitable for his condition. What is his current state of health? What medical examinations or specialist care does he still need?

Fatima al-Mishal: He needed a special diet. The doctor had instructed him to eat liquid and soft foods, such as soup and protein-rich mashed foods, to help his surgical wound heal. He was also prescribed stomach medication and painkillers. We brought him the medication prescribed by his doctor, but the authorities refused to allow it in.
He now has a tear and stiffness in his shoulder, along with pain in his back and neck, caused by having his hands restrained behind his back for a prolonged period. I asked the relevant authorities to follow up on his condition, but they were giving him painkillers that were unsuitable for his stomach, so he could not take them.
I contacted the Ombudsman's Office and requested that he be examined by specialists. A few days later, they called to tell me that an appointment had been arranged with an orthopaedic specialist. However, when my father called, I asked whether he had been taken to the specialist as they had told me. He said that, on the scheduled date, they took him away in a vehicle and returned him to the detention centre three hours later without taking him to see any doctor.

Question to Mujtaba al-Mumin
Sheikh Isa is in his seventies and, according to the family, suffers from chronic health conditions. Is he currently receiving his medication and undergoing regular medical examinations? Do you have accurate information about his health condition in detention?

Mujtaba al-Mumin: After the religious scholars were referred to trial, their detention conditions improved noticeably. We cannot say that they are receiving all the medical care they need, but to my knowledge, they are receiving their medication.
More efforts are needed to press the authorities to ensure that they are examined by medical specialists. For example, my father was scheduled to undergo eye surgery, but his arrest prevented the procedure from taking place. We therefore renew our call for the religious scholars to be examined by specialists and given access to the treatment they need, particularly since some of them, including my father and Sheikh Ali Mansour, had scheduled operations that could not be carried out because of their arrests.

Question to Sayed Yousif al-Muhafdha
At what point does a delay in providing medication or a failure to arrange specialist medical care for a detainee become a violation of their rights rather than an administrative issue? What legal responsibility does the state bear towards an elderly or ill detainee?

Sayed Yousif al-Muhafdha: The fundamental principle is that the right to health and preventive care must be guaranteed, and the state is responsible for facilitating and ensuring access to this right. It is protected under Article 8 of Bahrain's Constitution and Article 12 of the international covenant, as well as the Nelson Mandela Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners.
However, when it comes to procedures and their practical implementation, particularly where prisoners are detained for political rather than criminal reasons, we see the selective application of a particular policy rather than the application of the law.
This policy involves subjecting prisoners to a complex bureaucratic process that creates delays of many weeks between requesting medication and actually receiving it.
In my view, this reflects a policy of retaliation combined with the deliberate infliction of physical and psychological harm on political prisoners. We refer to this as a policy of "slow death".
On the surface, prisoners are not formally denied their right to healthcare, allowing the authorities to avoid criticism from international bodies. In reality, however, they suffer and develop health complications as they wait for the medication or treatment they need. This is particularly concerning in the case of Sheikh Isa, who is elderly and suffers from chronic illnesses while in detention.

Part Four | What Do the Religious Scholars Say They Experienced?

Question to Mujtaba al-Mumin
You have said that your father described the first days as the most difficult and that the religious scholars reported being blindfolded, threatened, and insulted. What exactly did he tell you? What do you know firsthand, and what have you learned about the other scholars?

Mujtaba al-Mumin: What the religious scholars experienced was truly horrifying, particularly during the first ten days of their detention. They were subjected to harsh, humiliating, and degrading treatment.
Security personnel deliberately insulted the scholars directly, using obscene language that I would rather not repeat. They went even further, insulting religious scholars, senior religious authorities, and even the Imams and sacred figures of the Shia community.
Throughout their detention, the scholars were kept blindfolded at all times, with the blindfolds removed only during prayer.
We later learned of further violations against some of the scholars intended to force them to sign confessions. One of the Shia community's senior religious scholars was threatened with sexual assault if he refused to sign statements attributed to him.
Sadly, these were the conditions the scholars endured during the initial period of their detention.

Question to Fatima al-Mishal
You have spoken about your father's account of being restrained for long hours and the insults, threats, and pressure he says he faced to force him to sign documents. What exactly did he tell you? Did he report these incidents to his lawyer or the court? Are there any injuries or medical reports that could help verify his account?

Fatima al-Mishal: Of course, he was unable to speak freely on the phone, but he managed to tell us that he had been forced to sign papers without being allowed to read their contents. The call was immediately cut off.
During the next call, I asked him how they had forced him to sign, whether through beatings or threats, but the call was cut off again.
He revealed the details during our first visit. He told us that he had been restrained and blindfolded throughout the day for approximately ten days during the investigation.
He said they insulted Ahl al-Bayt (peace be upon them), verbally abused him, spat at him, and humiliated him. They also threatened to bring in his wife and daughters if he refused to sign.

Question to Sayed Yousif al-Muhafdha
When several detainees report that confessions or signatures were obtained following threats or ill-treatment, what legal steps should be taken before such statements can be used in court? Who should bear the burden of proving that a confession was made voluntarily?

Sayed Yousif al-Muhafdha: Before addressing whether these confessions can be used as evidence to secure convictions, which would be invalid under international human rights law, I would like to highlight an extremely important issue.
Despite all the concerns raised about this case by the detainees themselves through their testimonies, by their lawyers and representatives, and by human rights organisations and media outlets, regarding the coercion and ill-treatment prisoners faced from the first day of detention and their interrogation without lawyers present, we have seen no action from the relevant bodies.
These include the Ombudsman's Office, the National Institution for Human Rights, the Special Investigation Unit, and the Prisoners and Detainees Rights Commission.
We have seen no public statements from these bodies, nor any indication of human rights action taken behind the scenes to ensure that prisoners receive the rights guaranteed to them under the Constitution. This is both regrettable and shocking.
We are also surprised that Judge Al-Ajlan did not initiate any investigation, despite personally hearing these allegations.
From a legal standpoint, he should, at the very least, have ordered that the detainees be examined by a forensic doctor and referred to the Special Investigation Unit. However, this did not happen.
I must emphasise that international law takes precedence over domestic law, and that Bahrain's courts and judicial authorities have a duty to ensure that they do not violate the provisions of the Convention against Torture, which Bahrain has ratified.

Part Five | The First Visit After Many Weeks

Question to Mujtaba al-Mumin
According to your testimony, your first visit with Sheikh Isa took place after approximately 81 days, with a glass partition separating you. How did he appear during that visit? Did you notice any changes in his weight, appearance, or psychological condition? How long did the visit last, and was the conversation monitored?

Mujtaba al-Mumin: Our first visit took place after 81 days of detention. It was held at Dry Dock Detention Centre. We had assumed that Dry Dock was where the scholars were being held, but my father told us that they were actually detained at the deportation facility in Askar and were transferred to Dry Dock for family visits.
During that first visit, it was clear that my father had lost a considerable amount of weight, as had the other scholars. The conditions they were living under were undoubtedly harsh and far from normal. My father also had a tremor in his left hand, which later disappeared.
We spoke through a glass partition, and security personnel were present in the visiting room. We did not feel that my father was being subjected to any particular monitoring, but the visit certainly offered no privacy for the family. It lasted no more than half an hour.
As for his psychological condition and morale, my father and all the religious scholars have always remained in high spirits. They are men of faith who believe that what they are experiencing is a consequence of fulfilling their religious duties. Their consciences are clear in this regard, and they have never felt psychologically defeated or broken. Their morale has remained high, and they continue to stand firmly by their convictions.

Question to Fatima al-Mishal
When was your first visit with Sayed Majeed? How did what you learned about his condition over the phone compare with what you saw when you met him in person?

Fatima al-Mishal: Our first visit took place on June 21.

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Part Six | When the Impact of Arrest Extends to the Family

Question to Mujtaba al-Mumin
You mentioned that your father's bank accounts were frozen. He is retired, and the family depends on his income. How has this affected your family's daily life? Did the family receive an official decision explaining the legal basis for freezing the accounts? Were you able to challenge it?

Mujtaba al-Mumin: In reality, I cannot interpret the freezing of the religious scholars' bank accounts as anything other than a measure intended to pressure and punish their families. All the scholars provide financial support for their families, and some support extended family members beyond their wives and children.
Of course, our family was affected by this decision, which we were never formally notified of. We only discovered it when we were unable to withdraw money for household expenses.
According to our lawyer, the decision was issued by the Public Prosecution and applied to all the scholars. We had no legal means available to challenge it in the first place.
This measure is fundamentally arbitrary and unlawful, and it disregards the legal principle that a person is presumed innocent until proven guilty.
It is true that we do not believe these courts adhere to fair trial standards, but this time they did not even bother to observe the formalities. From the beginning until now, the case has been far removed from the law and the standards of a fair trial.
Freezing the scholars' bank accounts was effectively a punishment imposed on them without a court ruling.

Question to Fatima al-Mishal
Alongside your concerns about your father, you have spoken about the search of your home and the confiscation of devices, money, and personal belongings. How has this affected the family?

Fatima al-Mishal: With all my father's bank accounts frozen, the suspension of the cost-of-living and housing allowances on which the family heavily depended, and the absence of any other source of income, the family faced financial hardship. The authorities even confiscated money belonging personally to his wife. Nevertheless, our livelihood is in God's hands.
We never received any official decision notifying us that my father's accounts had been frozen. We discovered this when we went to buy household necessities and were surprised at the checkout to find that the bank card was not working. When we contacted the bank, we were told that the account had been frozen.
I asked the lawyer to challenge the decision, but he received no response. We were told that my father was accused of money laundering and that freezing his account was therefore a normal procedure.
I also went to the Public Prosecution and requested the return of the confiscated personal money and my sister's iPad, which she needed for her studies.
They referred me to the court, where the lawyer submitted a formal request. However, it was rejected on the grounds that nothing could be returned before a judgment was issued.

Question to Sayed Yousif al-Muhafdha
Can financial measures or the confiscation of property effectively become a punishment for the family before any court judgment is issued? What safeguards should be in place?

Sayed Yousif al-Muhafdha: Since no judgment has yet been issued in the case, we can assume that these are exceptional measures pending the completion of the investigation and the court's ruling, particularly regarding the detainees' own bank accounts.
However, there has been considerable excess and arbitrariness in treating such a large number of possessions as being connected to the case. This would be difficult to prove, especially given the complaints from many religious scholars about the confiscation of their wives' gold, personal funds, and private savings that have no connection to the khums funds currently under investigation.
Many of the measures taken by the security agencies against the scholars have had severe consequences for their families, particularly those who depend on a detained relative as their sole provider.
From a human rights perspective, any measure that extends punishment beyond the individual concerned to their children, spouse, or other relatives violates human rights principles.

Part Seven | The Right to Attend Funeral and Mourning Ceremonies

Question to Mujtaba al-Mumin
During Sheikh Isa's detention, his elder brother passed away. You say the family tried to obtain permission for him to attend the burial or mourning ceremonies but was unsuccessful. What happened? Did you receive an official refusal, or was the request left unanswered?

Mujtaba al-Mumin: This was one of the most painful experiences our family has endured since my father's arrest. Being unable to see your elder brother one last time and bid him farewell before his burial is undoubtedly a deeply painful experience.
As soon as my uncle passed away, we contacted the lawyer, who informed my father and submitted an official request asking that he be allowed to attend the burial.
However, the lawyer received no response. He then submitted another request for my father to attend the mourning ceremonies, which lasted three days, but the authorities chose to ignore that request as well.
There was no official refusal. They simply ignored the requests.
The same thing happened recently to Sheikh Mohammed Saqour following the death of his sister. He, too, was denied the opportunity to bid her farewell and attend her mourning ceremonies.

Part Eight | The Defence and Legal Representation

Question to Mujtaba al-Mumin
You said that, according to the information available to your family, the lawyers were not given complete copies of the case documents. What does the family know about the lawyers' actual ability to prepare the defence?

Mujtaba al-Mumin: The lawyers are dealing with one of the most difficult legal cases with a political background. I must take this opportunity to thank them for their efforts and their tireless attempts to do everything in their power to defend the religious scholars.
Unfortunately, we all know that this case is not really about laws or genuine justice. Rather, it is subject to the whims of the ruler who ordered their arrest and imprisonment.
To my knowledge, the lawyers were prevented from obtaining copies of the case documents. They were only allowed to "review" them. They were taken into a room without their phones and permitted to read through thousands of pages of case documents.
The overwhelming majority of these documents consist of transcripts of sermons and speeches delivered by the scholars from the pulpits of mosques and mourning halls on various occasions.
Imagine asking four or five lawyers to review 7,000 pages in just six hours, for example.
Despite all these serious irregularities, the lawyers continue to work hard to prepare well-founded legal arguments in defence of the scholars, and they deserve our gratitude.
What they have been subjected to is yet another scandal in this sham trial, which lacks every standard of a fair trial.

Part Nine | What Do We Know About the Scholars' Daily Lives in Detention?

Question to Both Families
What do you currently know about the scholars' detention conditions? Where are they being held? How many people share each room? Can they see one another and pray together? How much time are they allowed outside their rooms?

Mujtaba al-Mumin: To my knowledge, the scholars are being held at the deportation detention facility in Askar, with three people sharing each cell.
They can meet other scholars because the cells are open to one another. However, they are divided into two groups. Members of each group see one another regularly, but they do not meet those in the other group.
Previously, they would encounter members of the other group at the medical clinic, but prison security personnel deliberately changed the schedules to prevent even these encounters.
Generally speaking, their conditions are not bad. They are allowed into the outdoor yard for approximately half an hour each day.
They can purchase items from the prison canteen, but they are prohibited from having certain religious books. For example, I understand that they were not allowed to have Mafatih al-Jinan, although they were permitted to keep Al-Sahifa al-Sajjadiyya.
Even regarding prayer, the prison administration appears to have deliberately restricted the number of turbahs (prayer tablets) available, seemingly to prevent congregational prayers. Each cell has only one prayer tablet.
Despite these restrictions, the scholars try to spend their time in worship, observing religious rituals, and engaging in religious discussions, relying heavily on their memories to do so.

Question to Both Families
Has any of the scholars been placed in solitary confinement? Do you have specific information about the elderly scholars or those with health conditions?

Fatima al-Mishal: The building where they are currently being held appears to be in good condition. There are three people in each room, and the rooms are open to one another. They perform congregational prayers and hold religious gatherings.
A washing machine and clothes dryer have also been provided.
However, they do not meet the detainees on the second floor except when they go to the medical clinic or the canteen. They are allowed into the outdoor yard for around 15 to 30 minutes.
To be fair, I have not received any information indicating that any of the scholars have been placed in solitary confinement. It appears that they are all being held together.
However, some are experiencing health problems due to their advanced age.
A few days ago, I was informed that one of the scholars had undergone a previously scheduled operation. This is a positive indication that detention conditions are improving, but I do not have any further information.

Question to Sayed Yousif al-Muhafdha
Why are these details important from a human rights perspective, even if they are not part of the charges?

Sayed Yousif al-Muhafdha: There is no doubt that this information and all these details are important. The circumstances surrounding the scholars' detention from the very beginning, and what happened to them, are essential in determining whether their trial complies with international standards.
We consider this trial to be in violation of international human rights standards.
The first violation concerns the presumption of innocence, which was undermined when the scholars were publicly defamed. Even if there had been no other violations, this alone would represent a serious breach that prevents the trial from meeting the legal and human rights standards of a fair trial.
However, in the case of the religious scholars, there have been several violations.
The second violation concerns their exposure to ill-treatment and being forced to sign statements under threats, beatings, and other forms of mistreatment. This also violates international law, and any confession obtained under coercion cannot be relied upon as evidence. Legally, such a confession is invalid.
The third violation is that some detainees were denied access to lawyers during interrogation. This deprived them of the opportunity to understand their legal rights and the nature of the charges against them, as well as legal representation and defence during proceedings before the Public Prosecution and the Ministry of Interior.
The fourth violation concerns the failure to give lawyers sufficient time to review interrogation records and the charges in order to prepare their defence.
Requiring them to read 5,000 pages in a session lasting no more than two hours was an impossible demand.
The fifth violation concerns the secrecy surrounding the trial and the concealment of the detainees' whereabouts during the first days of detention, which effectively placed them in a situation of enforced disappearance during that period.
The sixth violation involves denying some detainees access to medication and medical treatment, as well as subjecting some of them to sectarian insults in prison.
These violations are not limited to the context of the trial. They constitute human rights violations in their own right, rather than merely procedural breaches during judicial proceedings.
For this reason, international bodies and human rights organisations monitoring the scholars' trial have submitted numerous complaints to the United Nations and the Government of Bahrain through official correspondence.
These violations undermine Bahrain's commitment to its obligations before the Human Rights Council, weaken the rule of law, and contravene the protocols of numerous bilateral and multilateral agreements with the United Kingdom and the European Union, including economic, development, and regional agreements.

Part Ten | The Trial Through the Families' Eyes

Question to Mujtaba al-Mumin
When you say that you do not believe this trial meets the safeguards required to ensure justice, what specific facts have led you to that conclusion?

Mujtaba al-Mumin: From the moment of the arrests, through the Ministry of Interior's statement and the procedures that followed, there has been no indication that the laws in force in the country were being followed. From the outset, the case appeared to be politically motivated.
Even the security personnel who entered our home did not behave as though they were raiding the home of someone accused in a "terrorism" case.
Over the years, we have seen security forces raid the homes of young activists and witnessed how those searches were conducted. This time, however, the situation was different.
Despite the Ministry of Interior's announcement that it had uncovered the "main cell of the Wilayat al-Faqih organisation", a name that might lead someone unfamiliar with the facts to imagine a group of individuals with military training pursuing security-related objectives, the way the search was conducted told a different story.
Despite the government's claims, the search appeared to reflect a different understanding of the case. It seems that the security personnel themselves were aware of its true nature and the extent to which it was politically motivated.

The search was calm, not particularly thorough, and limited to two specific areas of the house. To my knowledge, most of the other scholars experienced the same thing, and their homes were not searched in their entirety.
This reinforces our belief that the case is politically motivated and that its political objectives are clear.
The subsequent decision to hold the trial behind closed doors and prevent lawyers from obtaining copies of the case documents further confirms our belief that the case against the scholars is weak and that the authorities cannot afford to make the documents public.
They know how human rights organisations and other advocacy groups would react, as well as the embarrassment and pressure they could face from the United Nations and Western countries concerned about the human rights situation. They would rather avoid all of that.
All these factors compel us to view this as a sham trial driven by political motives and lacking even the most basic standards of fairness and impartiality. I do not believe anything could change our view of it now.

Question to Fatima al-Mishal
As a family, what concerns you most today: the conditions of detention, your father's health, or the nature of the trial and the possible sentences?

Fatima al-Mishal: What concerns us most, of course, is the possible sentences, given what we have witnessed in this sham and unfair trial and the strange and illogical charges brought against my father.

Part Eleven | Who Investigates Complaints Against the State?

Question to Fatima al-Mishal
You approached the Ombudsman's Office and various other official bodies. After all these efforts, does the family feel that any independent body has genuinely investigated the matters you reported, or were you simply referred between institutions exchanging correspondence?

Fatima al-Mishal: No. Every time I approached them, there were clear delays and attempts to stall. Eventually, I would be told either that the matter was outside their jurisdiction or that all the procedures had been lawful and proper and that the case had been closed.

Question to Sayed Yousif al-Muhafdha
How should we assess the independence of an oversight institution in a case like this? Is it enough for the institution to receive a complaint and contact the Ministry of Interior, or should it interview the detainee, examine medical records and recordings, and conduct an independent investigation?

Sayed Yousif al-Muhafdha: The Special Investigation Unit has long taken pride in the number of complaints it receives, and there is nothing wrong with a human rights oversight body taking pride in that.
However, the real measure of its success is not the number of complaints it receives, but whether it fulfils the purpose for which the General Secretariat of the Ombudsman was established under Royal Decree No. 27 of 2012: promoting integrity, good governance, and the rule of law.
From the standpoint of transparency, we as human rights advocates therefore ask what action these bodies have taken regarding the case of the religious scholars and whether the public has been informed of the outcome.
Were the scholars who filed complaints interviewed? What were the findings of the investigations? Has any official been suspended?
These are all questions we are raising, and the local and international human rights community is looking to the General Secretariat of the Ombudsman for answers. It is responsible for fulfilling these objectives under the Constitution and the royal decree.



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Part Twelve | What Do We Still Not Know?

Question to Mujtaba al-Mumin and Fatima al-Mishal
After months of detention, what is the one question your families still have no answer to?

Fatima al-Mishal: What will happen to the religious scholars and the Shia community? What is being planned for everyone, and who is behind it?

Mujtaba al-Mumin: There is one question that has been on my mind since the moment of the arrests: Where is this heading?
How far do these authorities intend to go in their hostility towards the Shia community?
They revoked the citizenship of Ayatollah Sheikh Isa Qassim, dissolved Al-Wefaq Society, and arrested Sheikh Ali Salman along with other prominent figures. However, all these actions fell within the context of targeting the Shia community politically.
Now, this campaign appears to be targeting the Shia community on religious grounds, particularly given the measures accompanying it that restrict the practice of religious rituals.
The question I cannot find an answer to is this: How far do these authorities intend to go in their hostility towards the Shia community, and do they truly understand the consequences that such actions could have?

Question to Sayed Yousif al-Muhafdha
What is the most important information or document that should be made public now to allow the human rights community to assess this case independently: interrogation recordings, medical records, the case file, or court hearing records? And why?

Sayed Yousif al-Muhafdha: The Government of Bahrain, particularly the Ministry of Interior, turned the case of the religious scholars into a matter of public concern and publicly defamed them, in violation of international human rights law and Bahrain's Constitution. The authorities treated them as guilty before the judiciary had even delivered a verdict.
Today, the public wants to know the findings of the investigation and what evidence the state possesses against the scholars. It was on the basis of this alleged evidence that the authorities claimed they were part of a terrorist organisation, had foreign connections, and were financing terrorism.
For this reason, access to court hearing records and interrogation recordings has become a human rights demand. These materials are needed to establish whether the proceedings have complied with international standards, particularly since the current trial is largely closed to the public and conducted virtually.
No representatives of human rights organisations or Western diplomatic missions have attended the proceedings. There is also a lack of trust in the security agencies, which have violated the law since the first day of the scholars' arrests.



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Under Scrutiny

Human Rights Questions Seeking Answers and Opening Accountability Files



1. Why Is the Defendant Denied a Copy of the Case File?



The right to a defense appears to be undermined by the procedures followed in the trial of the religious scholars, turning a fundamental fair-trial guarantee into a restricted right. Defense lawyers have confirmed that they were unable to obtain a complete copy of the case documents, despite the extensive case file and multiple charges. There can be no fair trial when defendants are expected to challenge evidence their lawyers do not have copies of. The criticism surrounding fair-trial guarantees in Bahrain since 2011 makes the recurrence of this issue a serious cause for concern, rather than a mere procedural dispute.

2. Where Is the National Institution for Human Rights in the Trial of the Religious Scholars?



As dozens of religious scholars face serious charges, amid ongoing complaints of torture and restrictions on their right to a defense, the National Institution for Human Rights has a duty to monitor the trial, not merely the option to do so. As of early October 2026, the Bahrain Forum for Human Rights had found no specific report in the institution's public archives outlining its position on the trial or the findings of any monitoring it had conducted. In an official letter dated October 3, the Forum called on the institution to disclose the measures it had taken.

3. Are Disputed Confessions Enough to Secure Convictions?



Confessions must not become a shortcut to conviction, particularly when those who allegedly made them challenge the circumstances in which they were obtained. During the October 7, 2026 hearing, prominent religious scholar Sheikh Mohammed Sanqour told the court that he had been coerced. He also stated that he was surprised by an interrogation record containing questions he had never been asked. The Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry documented torture and shortcomings in fair-trial guarantees in 2011, while the UN Committee Against Torture raised similar concerns in January 2026.

4. Why Is There a Lack of Transparency in Investigations into Torture Allegations?



Announcing the existence of oversight bodies is not enough to demonstrate effective accountability. Hearings in the trial of the religious scholars included accounts of torture, coercion, assaults, and ill-treatment. These allegations require independent investigations and clear findings. Such concerns are not new. The 2011 Bassiouni report documented serious violations, while the UN Committee Against Torture, in its observations issued in 2026, reiterated concerns about the effectiveness of investigations and accountability for those responsible. Victims have the right to know whether their complaints have been investigated, what evidence has been collected, and what measures have been taken.

5. When Does Religious Affiliation Become a Security Suspicion Rather Than a Protected Right?



When religious beliefs, rituals, and religious authorities become grounds for suspicion, the focus shifts away from specific criminal acts and identifiable, verifiable individual evidence, as the authorities claim exists in this politically motivated trial. The case against the religious scholars has raised questions concerning jurisprudential opinions, khums, religious seminaries, and connections to religious authorities. These practices are, in themselves, lawful and protected under international law.

6. Is Testimony from a Confidential Source Enough to Restrict a Person's Freedom?



Secrecy cannot substitute for evidence, nor should the inability to examine the source of information give the prosecution's account immunity from scrutiny. In the trial of the religious scholars, the defense raised concerns about the reliance of investigations on more than 90 confidential sources, the unclear origins of some information, and the extent to which it had been independently verified. Discussions during the hearings also revealed that some witness statements were based on information passed on by others, rather than facts the witnesses had personally observed.