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for Democracy and Human Rights

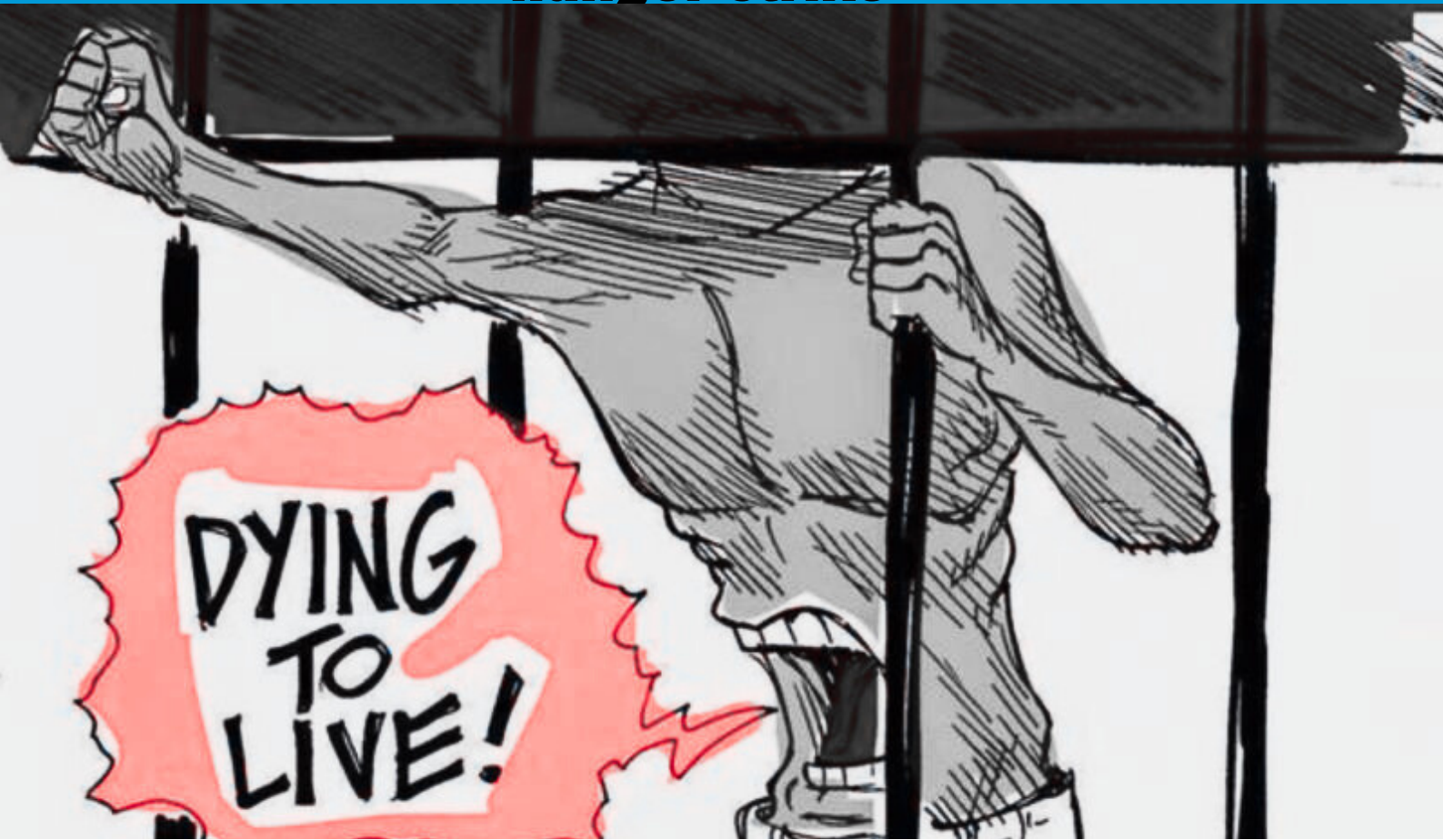
UPDATES ON THE CRACKDOWN ON HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE GULF

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Hundreds of Political Prisoners are on Hunger Strike





HUNDREDS OF POLITICAL PRISONERS ARE ON HUNGER STRIKE

On 7 August 2023, hundreds of detainees housed at Jaw Prison launched a mass hunger strike due to their sufferings behind bars. They called for their rights after the authorities ignored their demands and continued to violate their rights.

The prisoners, in their statement, spotted the light on main violations they are being subjected to, including long-running isolation, medical negligence, and unjust visitation system. They further explained that authorities isolated a number of prisoners for long periods over silly reasons. Moreover, during isolation, prisoners are being denied access to commemorate religious rites. The statement also pointed to the suffocating daily program that keeps the prisoners 23 hours a day inside the cell, while the prisoners are taken out for one hour a day to meet all their needs of communication, spreading clothes, sports and sunbathing.

The 460 hunger-striking prisoners found a broad solidarity, where the citizens participate in marches on a daily basis calling to meet the prisoners' demands. Moreover, the number of prisoners on hunger strike kept growing in which it reached more than 800 by the end of August.

The hunger-striking prisoners send voice recordings explaining the miserable conditions they are suffering from. They stressed that anyone who wants to know their real conditions could just see those who were released with great illnesses, and sometimes result in their death.



The prisoners also talked about the case of the prisoner Habib Al-Fardan, who suffers from a brain tumor due to medical negligence. Habib underwent, prior to his arrest, a surgery for a previous brain tumor. However, through detention, he was denied access to medical care, therefore, the tumor reappeared. The prison's administration still ignores Al-Faran's case.

As a result of the ongoing hunger strike, dozens of detainees fainted due to the sharp drop in blood sugar levels. Moreover, the prisoners confirmed that prison administration ignores cases of fainting for hours before being transferred to the clinic.

The prominent opposition leader Sheikh Ali Salman showed his solidarity with the political prisoners who are on hunger strike by abstaining from visits. Moreover, Mr. Hasan Mushaima also showed solidarity with hunger-strikers saying "I highly appreciate their sacrifices and patience, and I wish them victory."

In addition, the detained political figures expressed their solidarity with the hunger-striker prisoners in Jaw Prison, where they returned their meals for several days starting on 18 August. The detained figures are: Sheikh Abduljalil Al-Moqdad, Sheikh Mohammad Habib Al-Moqdad, Sheikh Ali Salman, Abdulwahab Hussein, Sheikh Saeed Al-Nouri, Sheikh Hasan Isa, Sheikh Zuheir Ashour, Mohammad Ali, Sheikh Abdulhadi Al-Mukhawdar, Sheikh Mirza Al-Mahrous.



HUNGER-STRIKERS REVEALS THE FALSITY OF OFFICIAL STATEMENT

On 14 August, the National Institute for Human Rights (NIHR) released a statement saying that "nurses have been provided around the clock in anticipation of any emergency" that may happen as a result of the hunger strike of political detainees in Jaw Prison. It further added that it will work to find solutions to the demands of the inmates in a balanced and fair manner.

Responding to the statement, hunger-striker detainees revealed the medical negligence they are being subjected to. One of them is the prisoner Ahmad Issa Abdulhussein, who confirmed that he is being denied medical treatment for 4 years now. He added that his repeated complaints, through the previous years, were ignored. Two officials interviewed him on 18 July 2023, over a complaint submitted by his family, and wrote a detailed report about his health conditions, and so far there is no response.

Detainee Fadel Abbas confirmed that he was prevented from entering the prison's clinic on 20 August despite his deteriorating health conditions. He added that he was transferred to the military hospital three times within a week. The last examination in the hospital showed an infection at the place of the surgery caused by the delay in medical treatment.

The prisoner Ali Abdulhalim confirmed that he repeatedly asked for eyeglasses while the prison's administration ignored all his calls. Moreover, the spokesman for the "Prisoners' Affairs Authority in Bahrain ", Jaafar Yahya, revealed that the jailed Sheikh Mirza Al-Mahrous, "almost died" due to his health deterioration, stressing that the authorities returned him to prison without completing the necessary medical treatment after spending 7 days in the military hospital.



INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY WITH BAHRAIN PRISONERS

Wide solidarity with prisoners in Bahrain worldwide. Brian Dooley, senior advisor at Human Rights First, said that Bahrain is lurching into another crisis as hundreds of prisoners protest about the lack of adequate medical care since August 7, 2023. “The current crisis could have been easily avoided - if Bahrain's government had shown an iota of wisdom, it would have released those unjustly jailed years ago, and given all those who need medical treatment adequate care,” he noted.

Moreover, US State Department spokesman, Vedant Patel, through a talk with reporters said that “We are aware of and concerned about the reports of this hunger strike [of prisoners in Bahrain].” He further added that Secretary of State Antony Blinken “expressed concern about some of these reports” during a meeting with Bahrain's Foreign Minister Abdellatif al-Zayani on 20 July 2023. In addition, the European Union called on Bahrain to “expand measures for the release of political detainees to include imprisoned activists who suffer medical conditions.” From her side, Mary Lawlor, the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders, expressed her concern after the recent reports on Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja's health, and called for his release.



ONGOING HARASSMENT OF ACTIVISTS

Several Bahraini citizens, who are being summoned for investigation repeatedly every month, were also summoned during August over various reasons. The Shiite cleric Sheikh Mahmoud Al-Aali was summoned on 1 August over a speech he delivered during Ashura commemorations. Moreover, on 3 August, the activist Ali Muhana was interrogated by police for the ninth time this year, over his participation in Ashura commemorations. Those summons serve as a violation against religious freedom which insists that everyone has the right to participate in religious rites.

On 5 August, at least five Bahraini citizens were arrested for taking part in a protest against the repeated desecration of the Quran in Europe. Among those detained are three activists, Ali Muhanna, Abdulmajeed Abdulhasan, and Munir Mushaima. They were released two days after their arrest without any official explanation.

Mhanna said in a video after his release: “I was in great pain because I was summoned and interrogated for 6 hours, and for imprisoning me for two days, and presenting me to the Public Prosecution.”

On 23 August, a group of Bahraini citizens were interrogated by security services over their peaceful participation in a march. According to Ali Muhana, one of the summoned citizens, he was questioned about his participation in a peaceful protest expressing solidarity with hundreds of political prisoners who are on hunger strike.



DEATH SENTENCES OVER POLITICAL REASONS

Saudi Arabia is considered one of the leading exponents of capital punishment in the Gulf region. Its application of the death penalty is riddled with discrimination and injustice where it is routinely used as a tool to silence dissidents and protesters.

During August 2023, at least two death sentences over political backgrounds were announced. One case refers to Sayed Hussein Haider Al-Qallaf, who was sentenced to death on 28 August. Sayed Hussein is from Qatif governorate which used to be repeatedly targeted by Saudi authorities over political reasons. The other case refers to the 54-year-old retired teacher Mohammad bin Nasser Al-Ghamdi, who was sentenced to death during July, however, the verdict was publicly announced during August. Al-Ghamdi was convicted of several criminal offenses related solely to his peaceful expression online. The court sentenced him to death, using his tweets, retweets, and YouTube activity as the evidence against him.





BORDER CRIMES

A new report issued by Human Rights Watch revealed that between March 2022 and June 2023, Saudi border guards killed hundreds of Ethiopian migrants attempting to cross the border from Yemen into the kingdom.

The report titled “They Fired on Us Like Rain: Saudi Arabian Mass Killings of Ethiopian Migrants at the Yemen-Saudi Border” found that Saudi border guards have used explosive weapons to kill many migrants and shot other migrants at close range, including many women and children, in a widespread and systematic pattern of attacks.

The organization explained that in some instances, Saudi border guards asked migrants what limb to shoot, and then shot them at close range. Saudi border guards also fired explosive weapons at migrants who were attempting to flee back to Yemen. In addition, people traveling in groups described being attacked by mortar projectiles and other explosive weapons from the direction of Saudi border guards once they had crossed the border.

DOZENS ARE SUBJECTED TO ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCE

On the International Day of the Victims of Enforced Disappearance, dozens are being subjected to enforced disappearance in Saudi Arabia prisons. Enforced disappearance remains systematic and widespread in the kingdom which legalizes the use of enforced disappearance in some cases. Article 20 of the Saudi law allows the authorities to isolate the detainee from his family and the outside world for a period of ninety days if the interest of the investigation requires so, and if the investigation requires a longer period of prevention, the matter is referred to the competent court to decide what it deems appropriate.

The Saudi authorities often conceal people's whereabouts when they are arrested, especially for the first few days or weeks of their detention, before the victims eventually resurface to face trial. Sometimes disappearances last a very long time, raising concerns for the safety and even lives of the victims. The Gulf Institute for Democracy and Human Rights (GIDHR) highlighted some of those cases. Moreover, there are several detainees who were subjected to enforced disappearance a few days before their sentences finished.

The retired officer Nawaf bin Shaifan Al-Azma was arrested in October 2016, and from that time there was no news about him, as no information was available about his location or conditions of detention.

In late September 2017, Saudi authorities arrested Dr. Razeen Al Razeen, who was a former head of the Executive Board of the Consumer Protection Association. There was no news of him since that time, and there was no information about his detention conditions.

Dr. Mohammad Al-Barrak has been forcibly disappeared since his arrest in September 2017. There is no information about the conditions of his detention or even the charges brought against him.

Ahmad bin Zaher Al-Muzaini is still under enforced disappearance since his arrest in September 2017, over his human rights activism. Abdullah Hajjaj Al-Arini has been subjected to enforced disappearance since his arrest in 2018 over tweets he had published expressing his views.

In September 2018, the engineer Dr. Sultan Al-Jumairi was arrested upon his arrival to the Kingdom and subjected to forcible disappearance, as no information was announced about the place or conditions of his detention.

After prisoner of conscience Aya Al-Juhani completed her 3-year sentence, the Saudi authorities re-tried her in August 2019, and since that time, no information has been known about Aya. Palestinian writer and journalist Mahmoud Kallam has been subjected to enforced disappearance since his arrest on 26 September 2019. Mahmoud was arrested while he was in the kingdom to perform Umrah.

On the other hand, there is a group of prisoners who are still behind bars despite the end of their sentences. They are being subjected to enforced disappearance, including human rights defenders Mohammad Al-Qahtani and Issa Al-Nukhaifi. There was no news of Al-Qahtani and Al-Nukhaifi days before the end of their 10-year sentence in October 2022.

Detainee Jaber Al-Omari finished his 7-year sentence two years ago, but he is still subjected to enforced disappearance. Jaber was arrested in April 2014, over his demand for the release of detainees, especially his brother, who had been detained since 2002.



UN AGENCIES: 100,000 CHILDREN ARE LIKELY TO BE SEVERELY MALNOURISHED

Three UN agencies warned about the critical situation in Yemen. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), and the UN World Food Programme (WFP) warned that, despite the slight improvements, nearly all six governorates in southern Yemen were assessed to be facing high levels of food insecurity.

Yemen remains one of the most food insecure countries globally, mainly driven by the impact of conflict and economic decline, the three UN agencies added. The agencies' statistics showed that between January and May 2023, about 3.2 million people experienced high levels of acute food insecurity in the six governorates, and these are classified as severe food insecurity.

Moreover, the report added that as acute malnutrition continues to worsen in southern governorates, it is estimated that in 2023, half a million children will be acutely malnourished, including nearly 100,000 children who are likely to be severely malnourished. It is also estimated that up to a quarter million pregnant and lactating women (PLW) will be acutely malnourished, while child stunting levels are also very high, ranging from 35.9 per cent in Abyan Lowland to 64.3 per cent in Hodeida Southern Lowland.



SIEGE IMPOSED ON YEMEN INCREASES CITIZENS' SUFFERINGS

The ongoing siege imposed on Yemen has caused tremendous suffering for millions of Yemenis who are largely dependent on imports of food, fuel and medicines. It is one of the main reasons for the large-scale humanitarian crisis in the country. The Minister of Transport, Abdulwahhab Al-Durra, confirmed that the worsening humanitarian situation in Yemen is caused by the illegal siege imposed on Sanaa International Airport. He stated that the coalition deliberately doubled the suffering of the Yemeni citizens by limiting the number of flights to only 3 per week, after it were 6 flights per week, noting that the flights have only one destination to Jordan.

The director of Sanaa International Airport, Khaled Al-Shayef, added that the reduction of flights to only 3 per week has a great impact on travelers, especially patients. He explained that many patients who traveled for treatment abroad are still stuck due to the great number of passengers that is much more than the number of flights.

Moreover, Al-Shayef stressed that medicines and medical supplies are still prohibited from entering through Sanaa airport.

On the other hand, the Minister of Transport, Abdulwahab Al-Durra, stressed on the Hodeidah port importance also. He added that Hodeidah port's activity is limited to only 35% of its capacity due to the difficulty of transporting goods as a result of the delay in the port of Djibouti and the delay of ships.