

## BAHRAIN

*Following the outbreak of anti-government protests in 2011, students, teachers and academics were arrested from schools and universities and teacher association leaders were imprisoned. There were many incidents of sectarian threats and intimidation in schools and universities that year.*<sup>461</sup>

### CONTEXT

The majority of attacks on education in Bahrain occurred amid the unrest that erupted in February and March 2011 during a wave of protests inspired by the uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt. But repercussions continued into 2012.

In February 2011, authorities forcibly suppressed peaceful anti-government and pro-democracy protests. Seven people were killed and many more were wounded.<sup>462</sup> Members of both the majority Shia community, which has called for a greater voice in the government, and the Sunni community joined the demonstrations for political reforms.<sup>463</sup> After weeks of protests, the government declared a three-month state of emergency and called in Saudi military forces to help keep order.<sup>464</sup> Sporadic protests against the government continued into 2013, and the country's human rights situation reportedly deteriorated.<sup>465</sup>

Political tensions were reflected in schools and universities. In early 2011, thousands of teachers went on strike, first demanding respect for human rights and later calling for better security;<sup>466</sup> thousands of students participated in protests, including in and around their schools; police entered school facilities to arrest students; and political and sectarian clashes involving students and parents occurred on school grounds.<sup>467</sup>

Political activities were prohibited at universities and schools, as well as at other government buildings and public institutions.<sup>468</sup> Teacher trade unions, along with other government sector trade unions, were banned in 2003 by the Civil Service Bureau Act 1.<sup>469</sup> The Ministry of Social Development dissolved the Bahrain Teachers Association, formed as a response to the ban on unions, in April 2011, alleging that it had incited teachers and students to strike.<sup>470</sup>

Net primary enrolment was 98 per cent (2006),<sup>471</sup> net secondary enrolment was 93 per cent (2011) and gross tertiary enrolment was 37 per cent (2011).<sup>472</sup> The adult literacy rate was 92 per cent (2010).<sup>473</sup>

### ATTACKS ON SCHOOLS

The Ministry of Education reported a pattern of attacks on government schools, typically involving damage to facilities by setting them on fire or throwing Molotov cocktails. Approximately 200 schools were reportedly attacked between September 2011 and October 2013.<sup>474</sup> However, it was not clear whether these were acts of political protest or, rather, vandalism.

### ATTACKS ON SCHOOL STUDENTS, TEACHERS AND OTHER EDUCATION PERSONNEL

During 2011, police arrested students and teachers for their political activities from school facilities, including from at least 15 girls' schools, according to the Bahrain Center for Human Rights (BCHR).<sup>475</sup> In July 2011, BCHR said it had received reports of arrests of 66 teachers, predominantly women, although it said the actual number may have been higher.<sup>476</sup> In December 2012, BCHR reported that police stopped a school bus carrying boys from an elementary and an intermediate school and held them at a police station until their parents came to sign a pledge.<sup>477</sup> According to BCHR, some students

and teachers arrested from schools reported that police interrogated and beat them, and threatened them with sexual assault.<sup>478</sup>

There were also reports of numerous suspensions and sackings, as well as salary deductions, of teachers and Bahrain Teacher Association members who were accused of having taken part in the February 2011 anti-government protests. On 15 June 2011, for example, the independent newspaper Al-Wasat reported that the Al-Ahd Al-Zaher School had sacked eight teachers and, on 27 June, the Unions Federation in Bahrain reported that the Ministry of Education had sacked 60 employees, mostly teachers.<sup>479</sup>

On 25 September 2011, a military court sentenced the president of the Bahrain Teachers Association, Mahdi Abu Deeb, to 10 years in prison on charges of using his position within the BTA to call for a strike by teachers, halting the educational process, inciting hatred of the regime and attempting to overthrow the ruling system by force, possessing pamphlets and disseminating fabricated stories and information. Abu Deeb alleged that he endured torture in pre-trial detention.<sup>480</sup> His deputy, Jailila al-Salmaan, received a three-year sentence. In October 2012, a court of appeal reduced their sentences to five years and six months respectively.<sup>481</sup>

Clashes between rival groups of students and their parents led to violence on school grounds. For example, according to the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry (BICI), on 10 March 2011, at the Saar High School for Girls, an argument between anti-government and pro-government pupils led to parents converging on the school. Some students and parents threatened the headmistress and staff and threw rocks at a school building in which they had taken refuge. Riot control forces were sent to disperse the crowds. Eight students were injured and

received medical care. Other schools reported similar incidents on a much smaller scale.<sup>482</sup>

The BICI report also documented complaints of abuse against members of the Sunni community at schools because of their religious affiliation or refusal to join protests.<sup>483</sup> In total, the BICI report identified 'approximately 83' incidents of sectarian threats in universities and schools, including verbal abuse and harassment of students as well as physical assaults.<sup>484</sup>

### ATTACKS ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Most incidents affecting higher education occurred during, or as a result of, the protests of February and March 2011 in which university students and professors participated. According to the president of the University of Bahrain, on 13 March 2011, 55 individuals were treated in intensive care after clashes at the campus between government supporters and 5,000 anti-government protesters.<sup>485</sup> The University of Bahrain and Bahrain Polytechnic subsequently suspended classes until mid-May and late April respectively.<sup>486</sup>

According to the BICI report, 73 students were arrested or detained after February 2011 and some were imprisoned for more than three months.<sup>487</sup> Security forces also questioned at least 15 professors from three universities for several hours before releasing them without charge, and detained one for over four months, Human Rights Watch reported.<sup>488</sup> One professor said he was detained with 10 other colleagues on suspicion of having participated in protests – and that Interior Ministry officials went to the university and ordered them to report to a police station, where they were blindfolded, interrogated and beaten before being released.<sup>489</sup> During 2011, the government also dismissed professors and suspended or expelled hundreds of

university students for participation in demonstrations and political activities. At the University of Bahrain, students not charged with violent crimes were reinstated but were required to sign loyalty pledges and received warnings not to engage in political activity on campus.<sup>490</sup> Of those charged with crimes, at least six were sentenced to 15 years imprisonment.<sup>491</sup> The University of Bahrain also dismissed 19 academics on charges that included participation in protests;<sup>492</sup> by the end of 2012, they had all been reinstated.<sup>493</sup>

Prior to the 2011 events, there was one reported incident concerning an academic. Dr. Abduljalil al-Singace, a professor of engineering at the University of Bahrain, was detained in 2010 after speaking about the country's human rights practices during a seminar at the UK House of Lords.<sup>494</sup> His lawyer reported that during detention, al-Singace was deprived of sleep and the crutches and wheelchair he relied upon, subjected to physical violence that resulted in a partial loss of hearing and denied medical treatment.<sup>495</sup> In June 2011, a military court sentenced him to life in prison, a decision the Supreme Court upheld in January 2013.<sup>496</sup>

### **ATTACKS ON EDUCATION IN 2013**

On 16 April, police raided the Jabreya Secondary School for Boys in Manama, firing tear gas and clashing with students who were peacefully demanding the release of one of their classmates, arrested from the school the previous day.<sup>497</sup> Injuries among students were reported and one was allegedly arrested at the scene.<sup>498</sup>

## ENDNOTES BAHRAIN

<sup>461</sup> This profile covers attacks in the period 2009-2012, with an additional section on 2013.

<sup>462</sup> HRW, World Report 2012: Bahrain (New York: HRW, 2012).

<sup>463</sup> Bill Law, "Bahrain protests prompt global concerns," BBC News, 15 February 2011; and "Bahrain activists in 'Day of Rage'," Al Jazeera, 14 February 2011.

<sup>464</sup> "Bahrain: King declares state of emergency," BBC News, 15 March 2011.

<sup>465</sup> Amnesty International, "Bahrain: New decrees ban dissent as further protests organized," 7 August 2013; and HRW, World Report 2013: Bahrain (New York: HRW, 2013).

<sup>466</sup> Bahrain Center for Human Rights (BCHR), Teachers Ordeal in Bahrain: Arrested, Tortured, Sacked, Suspended and Prosecuted (Manama, Bahrain: BCHR, 14 July 2011); and "Bahrain teachers continue to strike," Trade Arabia, 23 February 2011.

<sup>467</sup> For more, see Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry (BICI), Report of the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry (Manama, Bahrain: BICI, 10 December 2011), 95-97, 103, 119; and BCHR, "Assault on girls' school in Hamad by security forces," 24 April 2011.

<sup>468</sup> US Department of State, 2011 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices Bahrain (Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, 24 May 2012).

<sup>469</sup> Circular No. (1) for the year 2003 regarding the eligibility of civil service employees to join trade unions, [https://www.csb.gov.bh/ksb/wcms/ar/home/lawsregulations/ksb\\_legislation ...](https://www.csb.gov.bh/ksb/wcms/ar/home/lawsregulations/ksb_legislation...)

<sup>470</sup> Gulf Center for Human Rights (GCHR) and BCHR, "Bahraini Authorities Should Stop Harassing Teachers Association," 27 September 2011; and BCHR, Teachers Ordeal in Bahrain: Arrested, Tortured, Sacked, Suspended and Prosecuted (Manama, Bahrain: BCHR, 14 July 2011).

<sup>471</sup> The World Bank, "School enrollment – primary (% net)," The World Bank Data (2006).

<sup>472</sup> UNESCO Institute for Statistics, "Education (all levels) Profile - Bahrain," UIS Statistics in Brief (2011).

<sup>473</sup> The World Bank, "Literacy rate - Adult, total," The World Bank Data (2010).

<sup>474</sup> "Thugs attack school," Gulf Daily News, 11 October 2013; and Habib Toumi, "New Bahrain school attack takes toll to 24," Gulf News, 18 January 2012. For reported examples, see also: Habib Toumi, "Arson attacks on Bahrain schools continue," Gulf News, 5 January 2012; "Jidhafs Secondary Girls School attacked," Bahrain News Agency, 25 April 2012; "AMA International School attacked," Bahrain News Agency, 11 December 2012; "Thugs Attack Schools, Close them and Deprive Students from Studying," Bahrain News Agency, 14 February 2013; "Thugs attack schools as 'terror tactic'," Trade Arabia, 24 February 2013; "Mob attacks three more schools in Bahrain," Trade Arabia, 24 March 2013; "Girls primary school attacked in Bahrain," Khaleej Times, 17 June 2013; and "Clamp urged on school vandals," Gulf Daily News, 13 October 2013.

<sup>475</sup> BCHR, Teachers Ordeal in Bahrain: Arrested, Tortured, Sacked, Suspended and Prosecuted (Manama, Bahrain: BCHR, 14 July 2011); and "School girls beaten' in Bahrain raids," Al Jazeera, 11 May 2011.

<sup>476</sup> BCHR, Teachers Ordeal in Bahrain: Arrested, Tortured, Sacked, Suspended and Prosecuted (Manama, Bahrain: BCHR, 14 July 2011).

<sup>477</sup> "Reconciliation: The system is holding a bus returning children from school," Manama Voice, 18 December 2012; and BCHR, "Bahrain: 13 Year Old Children in Detention for Third Week and Others on Trial under 'Terrorism Law'," 22 December 2012.

<sup>478</sup> BCHR, Teachers Ordeal in Bahrain: Arrested, Tortured, Sacked, Suspended and Prosecuted (Manama, Bahrain: BCHR, 14 July 2011).

<sup>479</sup> Ibid.

<sup>480</sup> BCHR, "Bahrain: Court of Cassation rejects appeal of imprisoned unionist," 2 July 2013.

<sup>481</sup> Ibid.

<sup>482</sup> BICI, Report of the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry (Manama, Bahrain: BICI, 10 December 2011), 119-120; and BCHR, Teachers Ordeal in Bahrain: Arrested, Tortured, Sacked, Suspended and Prosecuted (Manama, Bahrain: BCHR, 14 July 2011).

<sup>483</sup> BICI, Report of the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry (Manama, Bahrain: BICI, 10 December 2011), 376.

<sup>484</sup> Ibid.

<sup>485</sup> Ibid., 359-360; “Witnesses: King’s supporters confront Bahrain students,” CNN, 13 March 2011; and Nada Alwadi, “Clash outside palace in Bahrain intensifies,” USA Today, 14 March 2011.

<sup>486</sup> Alicia De Halvedang, “University reopens amid tight security,” Gulf Daily News, 22 May 2011; and Sandeep Singh Grewal, “Security tightened at Bahrain Polytechnic,” Gulf Daily News, 20 April 2011.

<sup>487</sup> BICI, Report of the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry (Manama, Bahrain: BICI, 10 December 2011), 365.

<sup>488</sup> HRW, “Bahrain: Reinstate Ousted Students, Faculty. Hundreds Dismissed for Peaceful Dissent,” 24 September 2011.

<sup>489</sup> Ibid.

<sup>490</sup> Ibid.; BICI, Report of the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry (Manama, Bahrain: BICI, 10 December 2011); US Department of State, 2012 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices - Bahrain (Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, 2012); and US Department of State, 2011 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices – Bahrain (Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, 24 May 2012).

<sup>491</sup> BCHR, “University Students Sentenced to 15 Years Imprisonment and On-going Sham Trials,” 14 March 2012.

<sup>492</sup> HRW, “Bahrain: Reinstate Ousted Students, Faculty. Hundreds Dismissed for Peaceful Dissent,” 24 September 2011.

<sup>493</sup> US Department of State, 2012 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices - Bahrain (Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, 2012), 22.

<sup>494</sup> Scholars at Risk, “Call for Urgent Action for Detained Mechanical Engineering Professor Abdul Jalil Al-Singace of Bahrain,” 27 August 2010; and Front line Defenders, “Bahrain: Human Rights Defenders Dr. Abdul Jalil Al Singace and Mr. Abdul Ghani al-Kanjar Arrested,” 15 August 2010.

<sup>495</sup> Scholars at Risk, “Call for Urgent Action for Detained Mechanical Engineering Professor Abdul Jalil Al-Singace of Bahrain,” 14 October 2010.

<sup>496</sup> Scholars at Risk, “Bahraini Professor Sentenced to Life in Prison,” 22 June 2011; Nuit des Veilleurs du Canada 2013, “Abdul

Jalil Al Singace needs you!”; and BCHR/GCHR, “President Obama urged to help release Bahraini human rights defenders and activists,” 18 January 2013.

<sup>497</sup> “Bahrain protest rally draws thousands ahead of F1 Grand Prix,” BBC News, 20 April 2013; Reem Khalifa, “Police, students clash in Bahrain after raid,” AP, 16 April 2013; and BCHR, “Bahrain: School Attacked by Security Forces, Classroom Arrests and Tear Gas Attacks,” 17 April 2013.

<sup>498</sup> Reem Khalifa, “Police, students clash in Bahrain after raid,” AP, 16 April 2013; BCHR, “Bahrain: School Attacked by Security Forces, Classroom Arrests and Tear Gas Attacks,” 17 April 2013.