


[Français](#)
[Home](#)
[Contact Us](#)
[Help](#)
[Search](#)
[canada.gc.ca](#)

RESPONSES TO INFORMATION REQUESTS (RIRs)

[Search](#) | [About RIRs](#) | [Help](#)

BHR100629.E

31 October 2005

Bahrain: Demonstrations held in Manama on 29 and 30 October 2004; numbers and treatment of those arrested and detained; whether those detained have been released; any court or legal action taken against those who participated in these demonstrations or whether they currently face any related charges (September 2004 - October 2005)

Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board, Ottawa

Events Leading to Late October 2004 Demonstrations

On 24 September 2004, human rights activist Abd Al-Hadi al-Khawaja, alternatively cited as the executive director (Al-Jazeera 29 Sept. 2004; AP 29 Oct. 2004; AI 2005), director (*Middle East Times* 1 Oct. 2004), and vice-president (HRW 30 Sept. 2004) of the Bahrain Centre for Human Rights (BCHR), was speaking at the Uraba Club (*Middle East Times* 1 Oct. 2004; Al-Jazeera 29 Sept. 2004), a social and cultural centre (ibid.), when he proceeded to criticize the economic policies of Bahraini Prime Minister Shaikh Khalifa bin Salman al-Khalifa (ibid.; *Middle East Times* 1 Oct. 2004; AI 2005; AP 29 Oct. 2004; *Gulf News* 31 Oct. 2004; HRW 30 Sept. 2004). As a consequence, a number of sources reported, the Bahraini government arrested al-Khawaja (ibid.; *Middle East Times* 1 Oct. 2004; AP 29 Oct. 2004; AI 2005; Al-Jazeera 29 Sept. 2004; AFP

30 Oct. 2004), dissolved the BCHR (ibid.; HRW 30 Sept. 2004; *Gulf News* 31 Oct. 2004; AI 2005; Al-Jazeera 29 Sept. 2004), and closed down the Uraba Club (ibid.).

During al-Khawaja's arrest, a BCHR spokesman was quoted as saying, al-Khawaja was "held in total isolation [and] denied visits from his family, lawyers, human rights activists, or the media" (*Middle East Times* 1 Oct. 2004). The dissolution of the BCHR reportedly included confiscating its documents and funds, shutting off its office's electricity, and forbidding its members from entering office premises (HRW 30 Sept. 2004). Minister of Labour Majid al-Allawi reportedly stated that the BCHR had breached Law 21 (of 1989) on societies or associations (ibid.; Al-Jazeera 29 Sept. 2004; see also AFP 30 Oct. 2004). King Hamad bin Isa Al-Khalifa added that "he [would] not tolerate criticism of senior government officials" (Al-Jazeera 28 Oct. 2004).

Following al-Khawaja's arrest, there were several peaceful street protests calling for his release: one on 1 October 2004 with 2,000 protesters (ibid. 1 Oct. 2004), one on 15 October 2004 involving 200 parked cars creating a traffic jam on Manama streets (ibid. 15 Oct. 2004), and another on 21 October with 2,000 demonstrators (ibid. 21 Oct. 2004).

In 15 October 2005 correspondence with the Research Directorate, a representative from the BCHR stated, without mentioning specific dates, that on two separate occasions, police beat al-Khawaja and another member of the BCHR for their participation in demonstrations in support of unemployed Bahrainis.

Both Amnesty International (AI) and Human Rights Watch (HRW) reported that on 15 July 2005, police officers beat several people, including al-Khawaja and another member of the BCHR, as they were preparing to stage a demonstration against the state

budget, which "failed to include provisions for unemployed workers" (AI 19 July 2005; HRW 22 July 2005). The police made no arrests, but at least 30 demonstrators received hospital treatment for injuries they sustained from the beatings (ibid.; AI 19 July 2005).

Late October 2004 Demonstrations

On 28 October 2004 in Manama, another protest calling for al-Khawaja's release led to what Al-Jazeera claimed were hundreds of anti-riot police firing tear gas at over 1,000 protesters, some of whom were chanting anti-government slogans or throwing stones (Al-Jazeera 28 Oct. 2004), and the police arresting 30 demonstrators (ibid.; AP 29 Oct. 2004; Dow Jones 7 Nov. 2004). However, it should be noted that there are various other figures on the number of people arrested during these 28 October 2004 protests: Al-Jazeera later claimed 11 had been arrested (29 Oct. 2004), while Agence France-Presse (AFP) said that 26 people had been arrested (AFP 30 Oct. 2004) and *Gulf News* and *Country Reports 2004* both claimed that 25 had been detained (*Gulf News* 31 Oct. 2004; ibid. 17 Nov. 2004; *Country Reports 2004* 25 Feb. 2005, Sec. 2.b). *Gulf News* stated that 12 of those arrested were promptly released for lack of evidence (17 Nov. 2004).

The detained demonstrators denied the charges laid against them, which included "blocking traffic and disturbing the peace," and accused the police of using "excessive force" and beating them with batons and the butt of guns (*Gulf News* 31 Oct. 2004). *Country Reports 2004* stated that the police used tear gas and rubber bullets to quell the protests, and that two protesters were injured as a result (25 Feb. 2005, Sec. 2.b).

Citing a Bahraini human rights activist, Al-Jazeera added that the police had attempted to stop the demonstrations from taking place (29 Oct. 2004). The Associated Press (AP), citing Bahraini newspapers, reported the Interior Ministry as having said that drivers who participated in the protest would be referred to the General Prosecutor, and those who had violated traffic rules would possibly face up to six months in jail and/or a "small fine" (AP 29 Oct. 2004).

According to AFP, on 29 October 2004, in the Sanabis suburb of Manama, "a group of 30 hooded men threw Molotov cocktails" at police vehicles, injuring two police officers (30 Oct. 2004). In another report, *Gulf News* noted that the Molotov cocktail attack on two police officers (who were unhurt) and one firefighter (who sustained light injuries) happened during a protest which took place on 29 October 2004 in a suburb of Manama and involved a group of eight to ten men (31 Oct. 2004). According to the Committee for Support of al-Khawaja, which had organized the earlier protests, "'the committee condemned the acts of violence'," and asked demonstrators to "'confine their protests to peaceful means'" (*Gulf News* 31 Oct. 2004). The interior minister stated that those responsible for the attack would be prosecuted (*Gulf Daily News* 3 Nov. 2004).

Aftermath of the Late October 2004 Demonstrations

In the wake of this series of demonstrations, *Gulf News* reported, Bahraini Interior Minister Shaikh Rashid Bin Abdullah Al Khalifa announced that a new law was being considered to regulate protests and that it "[would] achieve a balance between the exercise of rights and public freedoms stipulated in the constitution and compliance with civic duties through the respect of the law and regulations" (*Gulf News* 29 Oct. 2004). According to the draft law, those participating in unauthorized demonstrations could be fined up to BD 1,000 [or CAN\$3,100 (XE.com 26 Oct. 2005)] and jailed for a maximum of two years (IPR 18 Nov. 2004). Supported by some political parties, including Islamic groups, the proposed legislation nevertheless drew criticism from the main opposition group Al Wefaq, which objected to the law because its passing would create a "'serious setback for the reform project'" (*Gulf News* 7 Nov. 2004). According to *Gulf News* and *Bahrain Brief*, a London-based publication produced by the Gulf Centre for Strategic Studies (*Bahrain Brief* n.d.), the reform project comprises a series of "comprehensive political, economic, and social reform[s]" which would promote greater freedom of expression and women's rights (*Gulf News* 12 July 2004; *Bahrain Brief* Feb. 2005). The reform project was initiated by King Al-Khalifa and endorsed by a reported 98.4 percent of Bahrainis in a February 2001 referendum (*Gulf News* 12 July 2004).

On 7 November 2004, Dow Jones reported that al-Khawajah appeared before the Bahraini criminal court where he pleaded not guilty to "charges of inciting hatred against the government and circulating false information about government officials" (Dow Jones 7 Nov. 2004; AI 2004). Thirteen people imprisoned for fifteen days in connection with the 28 October 2005 demonstrations allegedly began a hunger strike while in prison (*Gulf News* 17 Nov. 2004). On 20 November 2004, al-Khawajah, who, for the previous four days, had been carrying out a hunger strike in protest over the continuing detention of

13 of his supporters, collapsed and was taken to hospital for treatment; he soon recovered and was taken back to prison (ibid. 20 November 2004). The following day, the criminal court sentenced al-Khawajah to one year in jail for incitement of hatred against the government (VOA 21 Nov. 2004; AP 21 Nov. 2004; BCHR 15 Oct. 2005). However, hours after the sentence was handed down, King Hamad bin Isa Al-Khalifa issued a royal decree pardoning him and thereby releasing him (ibid.; Al-Jazeera 21 Nov. 2004; AI 2005; *Country Reports 2004* 25 Feb. 2005, Sec. 2.b; AP 21 Nov. 2004) and his 12 supporters from prison (ibid.; see also BBC 21 Nov. 2004; *Country Reports 2004* 25 Feb. 2005, Sec. 2.b). By 22 November 2004, all of al-Khawaja's supporters had been released from prison (ibid.; BCHR 15 Oct. 2005; Dow Jones 22 Nov. 2004; AP 22 Nov. 2004; AI 2005).

Country Reports 2004 mentioned that the BCHR continues to protest its official dissolution by the government, and that court proceedings on this matter were supposed to have begun in January 2005 (28 Feb. 2005, Sec. 2.a).

Current Status

In 15 October 2005 correspondence with the research Directorate, a representative from the BCHR indicated that all those arrested in connection with the late October 2004 demonstrations in support of al-Khawajah, including al-Khawajah himself, had been released following the king's amnesty. However, the representative claimed that the BCHR was still closed and had to operate out of members' homes, and that the office and funds were still in government hands (BCHR 15 Oct. 2005). Nevertheless, the representative also indicated that the organization continues to be operational and is highly active (ibid.).

On 18 October 2005, an article in the *Gulf Daily News* stated that Abdulhadi al-Khawajah, president of the "now-dissolved Bahrain Centre for Human Rights," presented "evidence of alleged police brutality" sustained during a June demonstration to a conference held in Ireland by Front Line, an international human rights group. Al-Khawaja took the opportunity to stress the BCHR's continued activities and its cooperation with other non-governmental organizations in the promotion of human rights, "despite harassment and threats" (*Gulf Daily News* 18 Oct. 2005).

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of additional sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

References

Agence France-Presse (AFP). "Bahraini Shiite Leader Condemns Attack on Police but Urges Release of Activist." (Factiva)

Al-Jazeera. 21 November 2004. "Bahraini King Pardons Jailed Activist."
<<http://english.aljazeera.net/NR/exeres/A6A61236-B97F-4963-BF37-594AA125CDCF.htm>> [Accessed 25 Oct. 2005]

_____. [Doha, in Arabic]. 29 October 2004. "Bahraini Police Arrest 11 at Demo in Support of Detained Rights Activist." (Factiva/BBC)

_____. 28 October 2004. "Bahraini Police Clash with Protesters."
<<http://english.aljazeera.net/NR/exeres/E1507DD6-F6BC-4C03-A3BD->

4B0F7EC66ECA.htm> [Accessed 25 Oct. 2005]

_____. 21 October 2004. "Bahrainis Demand Activist's Release."
<<http://english.aljazeera.net/NR/exeres/B7AA7B0B-D005-4D77-AB6F-57182834E63C.htm>> [Accessed 25 Oct. 2005]

_____. 15 October 2004. "Bahrain Activist's Release Demanded."
<<http://english.aljazeera.net/NR/exeres/AE197A79-F236-479A-AF78-59779A3C1526.htm>> [Accessed 25 Oct. 2005]

_____. 1 October 2004. "Masses Rally in Bahrain over Detention."
<<http://english.aljazeera.net/NR/exeres/AB9CDF07-8D77-4A51-8ACA-C2FE8E02153F.htm>> (Reuters) [Accessed 25 Oct. 2005]

_____. 29 September 2004. Indlieb Farazi. "Bahraini Human Rights Centre Dissolved."
<<http://english.aljazeera.net/NR/exeres/E3D6EEA3-909A-489F-904C-31D497328738.htm>> [Accessed 25 Oct. 2005]

Amnesty International (AI). 19 July 2005. "Bahrain: Use of Force Against Demonstrators." (MDE 11/003/2005) <<http://web.amnesty.org/library/print/ENGMDE110032005>> [Accessed 31 Oct. 2005]

_____. 2005. "Bahrain." *Amnesty International Report 2005*.
<<http://web.amnesty.org/report2005/bhr-summary-eng>> [Accessed 12 Oct. 2005].

Associated Press (AP). 22 November 2004. "Bahrain's King Frees Jailed Rights Activist." (Factiva)

_____. 21 November 2004. Adnan Malik. "Activist, Released from Prison on Royal Decree, Says King Serious about Reform." (Factiva)

_____. 29 October 2004. Adnan Malik. "Authorities Arrest Around 30 Protesters Following Car Rally in Support of Jailed Rights Activist." (Factiva)

Bahrain Brief [London]. February 2005. Vol. 6, Issue 2. "Reforms in Bahrain Gain Momentum." <<http://www.bahrainbrief.com.bh/english/February%202005/current-February.htm>> [Accessed 31 Oct. 2005]

_____. N.d. "Bahrain Brief." <<http://www.bahrainbrief.com.bh/english/index.htm>> [Accessed 31 Oct. 2005]

Bahrain Centre for Human Rights (BCHR). 15 October 2005. Correspondence from a representative.

British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC). 21 November 2004. "Bahrain Activist Pardoned by King." <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/4029919.stm> [Accessed 11 Oct. 2005]

Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2004. 28 February 2005. "Bahrain." United States Department of State. Washington, DC.
<<http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2004/41719.htm>> [Accessed 11 Oct. 2005]

Dow Jones. 22 November 2004. "Freed Bahraini Rights Activist to Continue Campaigning." (Factiva/AP)

_____. 7 November 2004. "Bahrain Rights Activist Brought by Force into Court." (Factiva/AP)

Gulf Daily News [Manama]. 18 October 2005. Kanwal Hameed. "Rights Group Highlights Demo Clash." <<http://www.gulf-daily-news.com/printnews.asp?Article=124669>> [Accessed 25 Oct. 2005]

_____. 3 November 2004. "Bahrain Minister Pledges to Prosecute Rioters." (Factiva/BBC)

Gulf News [Dubai]. 20 November 2004. Mohammad Almezal. "Bahraini Activist on Hunger Strike Back in Prison after Brief Hospitalisation." (Factiva)

_____. 17 November 2004. "Al Khawaja Supporters Begin Hunger Strike." (Factiva)

_____. 7 November 2004. Mohammad Almezal. "Battle Looms over Proposed Law to Regulate Rallies." (Factiva)

_____. 31 October 2004. Mazen Mahdi. "Al Khawaja Supporters Denied Bail." (Factiva)

_____. 29 October 2004. Mohammad Almezal. "Government to Regulate Protest Rallies and Meetings." (Factiva)

_____. 12 July 2004. Mohammad Almezal. "Interview: Bahrain 'Will Always be Safe, Stable'." (Factiva)

Human Rights Watch (HRW). 22 July 2005. "Bahrain: Investigate Police Beatings." <http://hrw.org/english/docs/2005/07/22/bahrai11401_txt.htm> [Accessed 31 Oct. 2005]

_____. 30 September 2004. "Bahrain: Rights Center Closed as Crackdown Expands." <<http://hrw.org/english/docs/2004/09/30/bahrai9422.htm>> [Accessed 25 Oct. 2005]

Info-Prod Research (IPR) Strategic Information Database. 18 November 2004. "Deputies Chamber to Examine Demonstrations Regulation Draft Law." (Factiva)

Middle East Times [Nicosia]. 1 October 2004. "Bahrain Human Rights 'Under Attack'." <<http://www.metimes.com/articles/normal.php? StoryID=20041001-043809-1828r>> [Accessed 25 Oct. 2005]

Voice of America (VOA). 21 November 2004. "Bahrain Court Sentences, Jails Human Rights Activist." (Factiva)

XE.com. 26 October 2005. "Universal Currency Converter." <<http://www.xe.com/ucc/>> [Accessed 26 Oct. 2005]

Additional Sources Consulted

Internet Sites, including: Arabic News, *Bahrain Tribune* [Manama], *The Economist* [London], European Country of Origin Information Network (ECOI), Freedom House, *Gulf Weekly* [Manama], Middle East Intelligence Bulletin (MEIB), Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL), World News Connection (WNC).

 [Top of Page](#)

[Important Notices](#)

The attached reproduction is a copy of an official work that is published by the Government of Canada. The reproduction has not been produced in affiliation with, or with the endorsement of the Government of Canada.