# BAHRAIN UPDATE

written by Campaign for Peace and Democracy | February 15, 2012

CPD's STATEMENT "End U.S. Support for Bahrain's Repressive Government" was signed by more than 1900 people, including several hundred Bahrainis, and was widely circulated in this country and Bahrain.

Tragically, the horrible repression in Bahrain continues, with very little publicity in the U.S. media and no more than an occasional pro forma rebuke from the Obama administration. Last May, when Washington's muted response to the Bahraini situation had become embarrassingly obvious, President Obama famously said about Bahrain, "you can't have a real dialogue when parts of the peaceful opposition are in jail." But since that time the U.S. government has issued no high profile condemnation of Bahrain's government, despite its continuing violent repression:

> More than 1600 people have been detained in Bahrain since pro-reform protests began in February and four have died in custody in suspicious circumstances. More than 2500 people have been dismissed or suspended from work. Thirty-five or more have been killed in anti-government protests.
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> Medical workers who treated wounded protestors were given sentences as long as 15 years by a special security court. After vociferous international condemnation, on October 5th Bahrain's Public Prosecutor ordered a new trial, before a civilian court, of 20 doctors and other health workers. Their fate remains uncertain.
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> Harsh prison sentences have been imposed on 21 prominent political leaders, ranging from life sentences to 15 years and 5 years imprisonment.
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> The president of the Bahrain teachers association Mahdi Abudeeb was sentenced to ten years imprisonment and the association's vice president Jalila Alsalman was sentenced to three years.

Bahrainis live under de facto martial law. According to *Al Wasat*, the only independent Bahrain daily, police still raid houses, arbitrarily arrest civilians and protesters, and smash cars. The government TV stations show pictures of protesters and ask the public to identify them so they can be punished. Yet Washington continues to soft-pedal its criticisms of Bahrain's government, calling on "both sides" to seek reconciliation and applauding the Al Khalifa regime for its purported reforms. For example, in his September 20, 2011, speech to the United Nations, President Obama said:

> In Bahrain, steps have been taken toward reform and accountability, but more are required. America is a close friend of Bahrain, and we will continue to call on the government and the main opposition bloc, the Wifaq, to pursue a meaningful dialogue that brings peaceful change that is responsive to the people.

In fact, however, the government's proposed reforms have proven quite empty, prompting *Al Wifaq* and other opposition groups to boycott last month's elections.

Protests have continued in Bahrain since the pro-democracy movement took to the streets in February 2011, but for many months they have been mostly modest in size because of the intense repression that followed the initial courageous demonstrations. Larger protests have at times erupted — most recently with the funeral of Ahmed al-Jaber al-Qatan, age 16, who was shot earlier this month while observing or participating in an anti-government protest near the capital Manama. The teenager died soon after being taken to the hospital, and after his funeral on October 7th thousands clashed with security forces in the largest demonstration since the government crackdown began in March.

Meanwhile, Washington continues to mute its criticisms of Bahrain's government and the Saudi forces it brought into the country. The U.S. Fifth Fleet remains stationed in Bahrain, military aid to Bahrain continues, and the Obama administration has announced plans for an arms sale to Bahrain worth $53 million. The sale, unless it is successfully blocked in Congress, includes more than 44 armored Humvees and 300 missiles, 50 of which have bunker busting capability.

The Campaign for Peace and Democracy has sent a protest to President Obama and key members of Congress to end this shameful support of Bahraini repression, a letter of condemnation to the Bahraini government, and a message of solidarity to Bahrainis struggling for their democratic rights.

Here are some things you can do if you would like to stay updated on developments in Bahrain:

- Regularly visit the Bahrain Youth Society for Human Rights website

- Follow Bahraini human rights activist Maryam Alkhawaja on Twitter

- Follow Bahrain on the Physicians for Human Rights Facebook page and on their website

- See Amnesty International's ongoing coverage of Bahrain

- See Human Rights Watch's website for its Bahrain coverage

- Check the Campaign for Peace and Democracy Facebook page for regular news about Bahrain

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## Footnotes