

HRW:

# Bahrain Intensified Crackdown On Activists, Critics in 2016

MANAMA (Dispatches) – Bahrain stepped up its suppression of activists and those critical of the Manama regime's conduct in 2016, in a move further deteriorating rights situation in the tiny Persian Gulf country, Human Rights Watch (HRW) says.

The New York-based rights organization in its 2017 world report accused Bahraini authorities of having prevented several activists from leaving the island and deporting six nationals after arbitrarily stripping them of their citizenship.

The HRW further stressed that the kingdom's "orchestrated crackdown on the rights to free expression, assembly, and association" had further undermined the prospect of a political solution to the unrest in the country.

"The Bahraini authorities have had their foot on the throat of Bahraini civil society for years, but in 2016 they indicated their intent to cut off its air supply altogether," said Joe Stork, deputy Middle East director at HRW.

He also underlined the need for a political reform in Bahrain with respect for basic rights, warning, however, that the kingdom is heading in the other direction.

Elsewhere in its report, the HRW highlighted the case of Bahrain's dissolved opposition bloc, the al-Wefaq National Islamic Society, which was

forced to suspend its activities and had its funds confiscated in June 2016.

Sheikh Isa Qassim, Wefaq's spiritual leader, was stripped of his nationality over accusations that he used his position to serve foreign interests and promote sectarianism and violence. The prominent Shia cleric has denied the claims.

The HRW report also noted that based on Bahrain's official data, the Al Khalifah regime has made little progress in holding security forces accountable for the torture of those detained during the 2011 anti-regime protests.

## Cameron Visits Bahrain

Former British Prime Minister David Cameron has visited Bahrain for talks with the sheikhdom's crown prince and business leaders despite growing concerns about the ongoing human rights violations by the Manama regime.

Cameron, whose term in office saw the closest ever diplomatic and military ties with Bahrain, met Crown Prince Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifah.

Cameron also visited the headquarters of the Bahrain Economic Development Board (BEDB) and met with Bahrain's transport and telecommu-



Bahraini police leave after dispersing protesters during clashes after the funeral of a teen killed in a police chase, in the village of Shahrakan, south of capital Manama, April 5, 2016. (Photo by AF)

nications ministers.

Pro-democracy campaigners have expressed concern over the visit amid speculations that Cameron could follow in former premier Tony Blair's footsteps and use his international contacts for personal business gains.

"During his term as prime minister, Cameron paid little regard to human rights in Bahrain, and now, without the obligations or responsibility of Tony Blair, using his elite network for lucrative personal gain," the Middle East Eye news portal quoted Marc Owen Jones, a campaigner with Bahrain Watch, as saying.

According to a report by The Guardian, Blair helped Saudi Arabian-owned oil company PetroSaudi lobby the Chinese government during his time as Middle East peace envoy in 2010.

Blair's company received £41,000 a month and 2-percent commission on any multi-million pound deals that were secured, the report said.

Sayed Ahmed Alwadaei, director of advocacy at London-based Bahrain Institute for Rights and Democracy, lashed out at Cameron for inking multi-billion-dollar military ties with the repressive regimes in the Persian Gulf region while he was in power.

## Fresh Saudi Aerial Attacks Kill Seven in Yemen

SANAA (Press TV) – At least seven civilians have lost their lives when Saudi military aircraft carried out a series of airstrikes against residential areas in conflict-ridden Yemen.

A local source, speaking on condition of anonymity, said three women and four children were killed as Saudi fighter jets bombarded an area in the Bayt al-Faqih district of Yemen's western coastal province of Hudaydah, Arabic-language al-Masirah television network reported.

A number of Saudi artillery rounds hit al-Sheikh area of Monabbih district in the mountainous northwestern province

of Sa'ada shortly afterwards, but there were no immediate reports of casualties and the extent of damage caused.

Yemeni forces and fighters from allied popular committees, in return, fired several rockets against the Alab border crossing in Saudi Arabia's southwestern border region of Asir, leaving scores of Saudi troops and pro-Saudi militiamen loyal to the former government dead and injured.

They had earlier targeted a gathering of Saudi soldiers deployed behind al-Montazah military base in the Dhahran district of the kingdom's Asir region, but no reports of casualties were

available.

The development comes as the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) says nearly 1,400 children have been killed in the ongoing deadly Saudi campaign against Yemen.

Meritxell Relano, UNICEF's representative in Yemen, said on Wednesday that hundreds more had been injured and many schools closed since March 2015, when Saudi Arabia started its campaign.

"Attacks on civilian areas continue to kill and injure scores of children in Yemen," Relano said, adding, "Instead of learning, children are witnessing death,

war and destruction."

Relano said the actual casualty toll was likely to be much higher than the verified figures. She said that some 2,000 schools across Yemen can no longer be used because they have been damaged, destroyed or are used as shelters or for military purposes.

Elsewhere in her remarks, the UN official called on all parties in the conflict to stop attacks on schools and protect children.

"Schools have to be zones of peace at all times, a sanctuary where children can learn, grow, play and be safe," Relano said.

"Children should never risk their lives only to attend school."

## Republican Lawmakers Signing Call to Move U.S. Embassy in Occupied Territories



A view of the Dome of Rock at the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound after the Friday prayer in al-Quds on November 11, 2016

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) – U.S. House Republicans are preparing a letter addressed to President-elect Donald Trump, calling on the incoming administration to immediately relocate the American embassy from Tel Aviv to occupied al-Quds.

The letter has so far been signed by over 100 Republican lawmakers in the House of Representatives, and is currently being passed around to garner more signatures.

It calls on Trump to "take swift action to relocate our embassy to Jerusa-

lem (al-Quds) as soon as you take office."

"Moving the embassy will strengthen the unique alliance between Israel and the United States and send a clear message to the world that we support Israel in recognizing Jerusalem as its eternal capital," the text said.

The letter lashed out at the outgoing U.S. administration for allowing the recent UN resolution against the regime's settlement construction in the West Bank to be passed by the Security Council.

On December 23, 2016, the UNSC passed the resolution after the U.S. refused to veto it, reversing its longstanding policy of shielding the regime from condemnatory resolutions at the world body.

The letter further reads the official relocation of the U.S. embassy from Tel Aviv to al-Quds is "all the more urgent in light of the anti-Israel Resolution 2334."

Trump has already indicated that his term in office will mark a significant step in the enhancement of U.S. relations with the occupying regime.

In September, Trump, who was the Republican presidential front-runner at the time, promised Zionist Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu that he would recognize al-Quds as the regime's "undivided capital" if he emerged triumphant in the U.S. presidential election.

On January 5, Jordan, which administers the holy al-Aqsa Mosque compound in East al-Quds, warned Trump of "catastrophic" repercussions in case he opts to honor his campaign pledge to move the U.S. embassy in the occupied territories from Tel Aviv to the occupied al-Quds.

The Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) has also warned the United States against the relocation of the embassy, saying all American embassies in the Arab world would have to close in the face of popular Arab outrage that follows such an action.

## Zionist... (Continued From Page One)

battles on the Syrian side of the Golan Heights.

The group has recently changed its name to Jabhat Fateh al-Sham after allegedly splitting from Al-Qaeda. Russia has also accused the US of supporting the terrorist group.

In a status posted on his Facebook page and quoted by the daily Haaretz, Knesset member Akram Hasoon said Jabhat Fateh al-Sham was bombing the Druze village of Khadr with Zionist war minister Avigdor Lieberman's support and protection.

The Israeli attack on Friday coincided with a powerful explosion that ripped through the southwestern Kafr Sousa neighborhood of Damascus in which at least eight people lost their lives.

The attacks came as United Nations envoy for Syria Staffan de Mistura said five villages in Wadi Barada had reached agreements with the government to stop hostilities.

On Thursday, as many as 500 civilians and militants evacuated the area as part of a reconciliation agreement between the armed groups and the government.

Damascus is pushing for more reconciliation deals in order to secure civilian lives there, and send in engineers to repair the facilities.

In recent months, hundreds of militants have laid down weapons and surrendered to the Syrian army under such reconciliation agreements.

The Syrian government says Takfiri militants in Wadi Barada, including those from the Fateh al-Sham terror group, are deliberately cutting water supplies to the capital and its surroundings.

A handout picture released by SANA on January 11, 2017 shows civilians in the Wadi Barada area near Damascus waiting outside a makeshift tent to have their documents checked by government officials before leaving the area.

Late last year, the army managed to liberate the eastern sector of Aleppo, the country's second-largest city, which had fallen to Takfiri groups back in 2012.

By doing so, the Syrian forces both restored the entirety of the city to government control and dealt the hardest blow to the militants since the onset of their campaign of foreign-fueled violence in Syria in 2011.

Government forces later secured the evacuation of remaining civilians and armed elements from the city under a ceasefire deal, brokered by Russia and Turkey, which were respectively representing the Syrian government and the armed factions.

The Aleppo deal set the stage for a landmark all-Syria truce deal between Damascus and foreign-backed militant groups operating in the country. The Daesh and Fateh al-Sham terror groups are excluded from the ceasefire deal.

The diplomatic achievements were made possible following high-level trilateral talks involving Russia, Iran and Turkey over the Syria crisis in Moscow.

## Refugees... (Continued From Page One)

International Organization for Migration (IOM), said migrant movements across the Mediterranean had "started out in a big way" in 2017, and the death toll for the year was already 27.

The World Meteorological Organization said a movement of cold Siberian air into southeastern Europe had driven temperatures in Greece, Italy, Turkey and Romania 5-10 degrees Celsius lower than normal. Such cold outbreaks happen about once in 35 years on average, the WMO said.

## First... (Continued From Page One)

world can accept and hope that peace can be reached through dialogue," he said.

"We struggled for two years to purchase planes from Airbus," Iran Air head Farhad Parvaresh told reporters. "There were many problems that still remained from the past and we had to go through a very difficult path to finalize the deal with Airbus," he added.

The official emphasized that providing funds to support purchases of planes from Airbus contained various complexities.

"This was because Iran had not used the mechanisms to provide foreign funds [for its purchases from overseas supplies] over the past two decades."

The Boeing deal is Iran's biggest with an American company since the 1979 revolution and U.S. Embassy takeover. It calls for 50 Boeing 737s and 30 Boeing 777s to be delivered over the next decade.

Iran Air is also expected to seal an order for 20 turboprops from European manufacturer ATR.