

Bahrain | Women human rights defenders must be protected

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Interrogation, travel bans, arrest, and torture are but some of the challenges routinely faced by women human rights defenders in Bahrain. On the International Women Human Rights Defenders Day we reiterate the call for their protection.



Just days ago, Nedal al-Salman was advised that a travel ban prevented her leaving Bahrain. Al-Salman is the Head of International Relations and Women & Children's Rights Advocacy at Bahrain Centre for Human Rights, and is active in the promotion of women's rights in Bahrain.

Al-Salman was en route to participate in the European Union NGO Forum when she was notified that she was unable to leave the country. The reason for the travel ban was not disclosed, al-Salman was simply told to contact the Public Prosecutor.

This is the second travel ban al-Salman has received in two years; a restriction imposed simply due to her legitimate work in defence of human rights.

Last year, al-Salman was deliberately prevented from participating in the [33rd Session of the UN Human Rights Council](#), during which she had planned to call for international action to immediately and unconditionally release all defenders, and to expose human rights violations.

'Al-Salman is not alone, and cases of intimidation and reprisals suffered by defenders for engaging with the UN system are not a new development. Women defenders in Bahrain are subject to continuous and systematic threats and restrictions, even facing prison or exile if they speak out,' said ISHR's Legal Counsel Tess McEvoy.

Zainab Al-Khamees - a woman human rights defender and member of the Bahrain Human Rights Society - was prevented from traveling and summoned to Court in October this year en route to the [Dublin Platform](#), an event held by Front Line Defenders. Previously, Al-Khamees' home was raided and she has received a summons for interrogation for allegedly taking part in an 'illegal assembly.'

Jalila al-Salman - a teacher and the former vice president of the (now dissolved) Bahraini teachers' association- also faces a travel ban. She was previously arrested and detained and tortured for her alleged role in coordinating a teachers' strike following protests calling for government reform. Jalila al-Salman and her colleagues faced charges of 'calling for and inciting the overthrow and hatred of the ruling system, possessing anti-political system pamphlets, spreading malicious and fabricated news and taking part in illegal gatherings.'

Nazeeha Saeed - correspondent for Radio Monte Carlo Doualiya and France24 and former [ISHR HRDAP trainee](#) - has been charged with 'unlawfully working for international media.' Saeed has previously been detained, and subjected to torture, ill-treatment, and humiliation by police. She as well is banned from travel.

These women human rights defenders are subject to reprehensible treatment in response to their activism and commitment to human rights issues.

'They advocate for justice and fundamental rights, putting their own safety and wellbeing at risk. These committed women human rights defenders are the backbone of hope. The international community must not remain silent', said ISHR's Program Manager (women's rights) Pooja Patel. 'Defenders must have the rights to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restriction.'

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