



### **The Bahraini Diaspora ... A need for Sustainable Solutions**

#### **General Information about Bahrain:**

- Bahrain is member of the Gulf Cooperation Council, located in the Arabian Gulf, and of 760 square km. According to the July 2018 census, Bahrain's population is estimated at 1,442,659 and the number of immigrants constitutes approximately 48% of the total population based on the United Nations 2017 data. Numerous published estimates reported that the number of citizens represents 46% of the total population.
- According to unofficial statistics, Shia citizens constitute the majority of nationals.
- The government faced the democratic protests that Bahrain witnessed in 2011 with repressive measures.
- The situation in Bahrain continues to bear political, economic, and social deterioration. Shiites, in particular, complain of human rights violations represented in discrimination and religious persecution. They have called for years, with citizens and activists from the Sunni community, to establish an elected government, enjoy a democratic life; however, the government has adopted repressive measures to face these calls.
- International human rights reports, including UN reports, documented widespread violations in Bahrain against people demanding for a democratic transformation and exercising freedom of expression and belief. However, the international community did not exert effective pressure to push the Bahraini government to tackle these violations.

#### **Bahraini Refugees: a Consequence of Repression and the Absence of Citizenship**

In 2011, Bahrain witnessed widespread human rights violations, especially after the government suppressed the massive popular protests that took place in the country on February 14 of that year and beyond. The methods of repression that were documented by the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry (BICI) report, known as the Bassiouni Report, caused many adverse effects on political, economic, civil and social rights, including harming and endangering lives within the country.

Over the years after 2011, many Bahrainis had to leave the country due to threats, prosecutions and reprisals against opposition figures and activists. Furthermore, the government revoked the citizenships of many activists after 2012. The numbers of nationality revocation cases reached a record of 990 in 2019. It is noteworthy that most of those who had their citizenships revoked are prominent dissidents and clerics, and the government forcibly deported a number of them in the absence of measures that respect their basic and fundamental human rights, and the rights of their families.

The ongoing political crisis in Bahrain over the past years, has caused a phenomenon of Diaspora that led many Bahrainis to seek refuge in many countries around the world. This phenomenon was accompanied by extensive violations and hardships that the citizens were subjected to, including the loss of a sense of safe homeland, deprivation of identity and nationality, the lack of easy access to a safe alternative, in addition to social and economic difficulties, and the difficulty of communicating with their families in Bahrain, for the fear of the government's reprisals against their families.

### **Diaspora around the World**

According to published United Nations statistics, Bahraini refugees are spread in many countries around the world. For instance, in 2018, 253 refugee situations were documented in Iraq, 48 of which were documented under the category of "asylum seekers." All the cases (48) were directly related to the political situation in Bahrain since 2011.

According to the available figures published on the UNHCR website, Bahraini refugees have spread, between 2011 and 2018, over many countries known to be outside the framework of countries that receive refugees and provide legal and safety guarantees to refugees, and these countries included: Iraq, Syria, Jordan, Ethiopia, Egypt, Yemen, Pakistan, Lebanon, Somalia, and Sudan.

Moreover, there are large numbers of Bahraini refugees in the Islamic Republic of Iran, and according to sources provided by activists, their numbers are estimated at more than 400 cases. The majority fear persecution for political reasons, additionally many of those attending the seminary in Qom for religious studies, fear maltreatment if they decide to visit or relocate in Bahrain.

Furthermore, there are numbers of refugees scattered in Europe, UK, Canada, the United States, Australia, New Zealand, and other countries in different continents of the world. Most of these refugees received asylum and protection, and their number, as registered in the UNHCR, is estimated to be more than 376 until the year 2018 , and some of them are facing some difficulties in obtaining asylum.

It is noteworthy that these figures are from asylum requests through UNHCR; however, the actual numbers of Bahraini refugees far exceeds the official figures published on the UNHCR website. Sources claim that the total number of refugees exceeds 1500 Bahraini's in 2019.

In the same context, some Bahrainis abroad, despite obtaining asylum, fear persecution by the Bahraini government, as the case of the Bahraini soccer player Hakim Al-Uraibi has demonstrated. Hakim a refugee in Australia, was arrested in Thailand earlier in 2019. Similarly, some asylum-seekers have been extradited to Bahrain, like Muhammad Al-Shuwaikh, who was deported from the Netherlands in October 2019 to Bahrain and sentenced, after that, to life imprisonment and citizenship revocation. Furthermore, there was fear of the extradition of the activist and the cleric, Sheikh Ahmed Nawar, to Bahrain after the German authorities rejected his asylum application despite residing in Germany for years, however, he was eventually allowed to leave to a third country.

## Recommendations

While the countries that are hosting refugees seek to limit the flow of refugees, and while various countries are making efforts to resettle refugees, it becomes a necessity for the international community to work on tackling the Bahraini refugee dilemma as a political issue, in the first place, which is directly related to the efforts required to address the internal political crises in the country. We believe that contributing to resolving the political crisis will be the best contribution to address the phenomenon of "Bahraini refugees," as it is a phenomenon that constitutes a burden for the host countries, and for the refugees themselves, of which many suffer from forced immigration from their homeland and are unable to communicate with their families in Bahrain or consider resettling in the country.

In light of the 1951 Refugee Convention and the phenomenon of the "Bahraini diaspora" and the fear of its various repercussions, Bahrain Interfaith presents the following recommendations to the States participating in the global refugee forum:

1. (BI) calls upon The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to urgently consider handling the cases of Bahraini citizens who had their citizenship revoked, and to assist them in resettling in safe countries.
2. (BI) advises International bodies to place effective pressure on the Bahraini government to abolish local laws that allow the revocation of citizenship.
3. International airlines are expected to prevent the Bahraini government from using their carriers in forcefully exiling Bahraini citizens.
4. Bahrain Interfaith urges hosting countries for Bahraini refugees to expedite procedures for family reunification.
5. BI calls upon UNHCR and hosting countries to expedite the applications of Bahraini asylum seekers in different countries and tackle appending applications.
6. Bahrain Interfaith believes that one of the core solutions to the Bahraini Refugee crisis is to urge the Bahraini government to put an end to systematic human rights violations and reprisals against activists that lead many of them to seek asylum in other countries.
7. Bahrain Interfaith urges the government of Bahrain to cooperate with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in assuring and guaranteeing the safety and well being of refugees living abroad.
8. (BI) advises all parties to consider that resolving the political crisis through dialogue and national reconciliation is the right way forward to tackle the phenomenon of Diaspora and limit the numbers of Bahraini refugees and asylum seekers in countries around the world.