

Ending the Conflict in Bahrain ... and Establishing Cooperation and Harmony

A Reading of the statement of Ayatollah Sheikh Issa Qassim
on the anniversary of February 14 year 2019

10 February 2020

Bahrain Interfaith
مركز البحرين للحوار والتسامح



Bahrain Interfaith
مركز البحرين للحوار والتسامح



Ending the Conflict in Bahrain and Establishing Cooperation and Harmony

A Reading of the statement of Ayatollah Sheikh Issa
2019 year 14 Qassim on the anniversary of February

INDEX

Introduction	4
Summary of the statement headlines of the view and the position	6
A General Analysis of the Statement's Content	7
Appendices	15

First: Introduction

Ayatollah Sheikh Issa Qassim, leader of the Shiite community in Bahrain, left his country on July 2018, and headed towards the British capital London, to begin his treatment journey from there, following the deterioration of his health as a result of the security conditions and measures that he was exposed to in the country. During his stay in London, the public appearances and activities of Sheikh Qassim revolved around three main titles:

1- Treatment: Sheikh Qassim underwent three medical operations, a laparoscopic operation on July 14, 2018, another operation on July 24 of the same year – which lasted for hours, and kept him under intensive care for 48 hours – and an eye operation on October 10, 2018.

2- Religious and Social Visits: Ayatollah Sheikh Qassim visited a number of Shiite Islamic centers in London.

3- A Memorial Statement: Ayatollah Sheikh Qassim issued one single statement during his stay in London, which was dedicated as a tribute to his lifelong companion, the grand scholar Sheikh Abd al-Hussain al-Satri.



In late December 2018, it was announced that Ayatollah Sheikh Qassim was leaving Britain and heading towards Iraq. Remarkably, this visit lasted for months. In addition to his visits to the holy shrines in the country, and his reception of Iraqi politicians in his residence, the most prominent among Sheikh Qassim's activities was his visit to the house of the grand Source of Emulation (Marji'e) Sayed Ali Al-Sistani in the city of Najaf.



On his last day in Iraq – February 1, 2019 – Ayatollah Sheikh Issa Qassim issued his first political statement ever since his troubles in Bahrain, and ever he departed the country. The statement was entitled: “This is Bahrain”, it was brief, and it held the assurance of Sheikh Qassim on pursuing demands for reform in the country. On the next day, Sheikh Qassim headed towards Iran, where he resides until the day. From there, in addition to pursuing his treatment, Sheikh Qassim started issuing political statements, and intensified – based on his patriarchal and leadership status – his extensive political and religious activities on a number of occasions and on several levels. He issued his first political statement from there, which is the statement of the Anniversary of February 14 in 2019, and which will be analyzed and reflected on in this paper.

Second: Summary of the statement headlines of the view and the position

Ayatollah Sheikh Issa Qassim opens his statement on the Anniversary of February 14, in 2019 by announcing the need for stability in Bahrain, and clarifies that this would be achieved by going into “new correct circumstances” that would be upheld on basis of “just relations between its people and its government”. This requires, according to the statement, an initiative by the government of changing its views and treatment of the people, and of showing respect to the dignified human beings that they are. The headline of this change would be – as repeatedly asserted in the statement – a recognition of people’s rights, most primarily of which being their “political right”.

The statement recurrently expresses feelings of grief on the state of “confrontation” and “difficulties” that both the nation and the citizens continue to suffer from. [In addition to that], it assures the presence of “immense difficulties” in Bahrain due to the “ongoing confrontation” which should be ended by the formula stated above.

The statement stresses on its refusal of the persistence of this confrontation and conflict, to the extent that it “criminalizes” and accuses with “betrayal” those working on turning Bahrain into “an endless battlefield with accumulated hardships until its existence burns out”, among “the government or others”, or among other countries that are “assisting” on maintaining “this conflict, and these hardships and losses”. The statement stresses on disclosing this position by calling for considering the party responsible for this as an “enemy” to the nation and its people.

The means to changing this status-quo is having an “effective political participation” which – according to the statement – is the practical evidence of serious reforms.

The statement lists the flagrant violations that Bahrain and its citizens suffer from at the level of politics, religion, freedom of belief, economy, and security. Meanwhile, it emphasizes that “loyal citizens” seek to end the “difficulties” and “attrition” in the country, and seek for “the country to rest” based on the need for the government to launch in assuming its natural tasks of serving the people, which, [in turn], would be followed by “harmony” and “cooperation” for building the nation.



Third: A General Analysis of the Statement's Content

The statement issued by Ayatollah Sheikh Issa Qassim – the spiritual father of the Shiite community in Bahrain – on the Eighth anniversary of the popular demands for reform in Bahrain last year (February 2019), includes a number of noteworthy broad lines that can be considered, in a way or another, as standing out on the rhetoric around the political conflict in Bahrain since February 14, 2011, and until this day. In this statement, which we celebrate the one-year anniversary of, Sheikh Qassim inaugurates a new turn, a more spacious and positive horizon for the daily life of the crisis in Bahrain, with the proposition of a path that is different from what would be expected amidst the deadlock in the country.

Ending the conflict and attrition the homeland and the human dignity

The statement of Sheikh Qassim affirms that it has become “highly required for the conflict to end, for the attrition to cease, and for the country to rest”, and this is an explicit declaration of the unwillingness to continue with the crisis, and an insistence upon the necessity of working on ending “attrition”, which would lead for “the country to rest”. From here, the statement of Sheikh Qassim presents two values: 1- Homeland 2- Human dignity

These two values are the basis, the starting point, and the common ground towards “establishing a new kind of relationship between the people and the government”. The discussion about the dualism of “homeland” and “human dignity” is intended to pave the way for rebuilding trust around them, since they have been the basis in various parties’ speeches and political choices. Moving towards this new horizon requires that these parties surpass this duality which could be described as mistakes of the moment, barriers of doubt, and skepticism among the various political players in Bahrain.

Positive atmospheres despite past occurrences

The statement of Sheikh Qassim proposes a list of constructive goals in the context of creating common values which could serve as a venue for harmony between the ruling institution and the opposition. However, what is more important is that the statement launches a genuine desire of creating positive atmospheres which could serve as a basis for overcoming the state of aggravation, and stagnancy in adopting sharp and stifling positions, which has been the case for years.

The significance of this position lies in that it is issued by a religious symbol considered to be the most prominent and influential figure within the opposition, even though he lives abroad not in the country, in addition to the fact that it is issued after two and a half years of incorrect political regulations – which Sheikh Qassim is a key subject of – in reference to the decision of the Bahraini authorities to revoke his citizenship on June 20, 2016 and surrounding his house in Al-Diraz before he left the country on July 9, 2018, for treatment in Britain, London.

The state must take the first step

Sheikh Qassim provides his understanding and empathy for harvesting eight years, with its subsequent repercussions and accumulated losses at the national level (Bahrain), and the human level (the Bahrainis) alike. Recalling this was not for the purpose of fueling atmospheres, entering into new mazes, or proceeding with poorly studied options. Rather, Sheikh Qassim clearly states that “all those loyal to Bahrain, among its citizens and others, want it to rest from its internal hardships and its internal conflict that has lasted for too long, exhausted extensively, and produced extreme damages on the nation, on its unity, and on its human dignity”.

The Indication of Loyalty: the will to end the internal conflict

There is a revealing indication in Sheikh Qassim's usage of the term “loyalty” in the context of the aforementioned paragraph in the statement. The usage of this term implies a national vision in reading the internal conflict, where the expression of “all those loyal to Bahrain, among its citizens and others” indicates a “relentless pursuit” (i.e. a “will”) to end “the hardships of the internal confrontation, and the internal conflict”, due to the “attrition” that it has created and the “damages” that it has caused on all levels of the country: in terms of unity, land, and human dignity.

On the other hand, in order to get out of the bottleneck, the new and correct scenario presented by Sheikh Qassim is restoring stability in the country (homeland), and restoring the dignity and humanity of the Bahraini person (human dignity), by presenting a clear change in the “authority's attitude, views, and positions towards the people, by treating them with respect, recognizing their humanity and dignity”.

The State's position towards Qassim's statement

A full year has passed since the statement of Sheikh Qassim was issued, despite that, it is difficult to find a clear and explicit position by the authority in Bahrain, or by any of the institutions and entities that express its will on its behalf, towards the statement with the calls and initiatives that it contains, even though it was expected - or assumed - that the statement would be a motivation for creating a positive response by official authorities, especially with regards to the national headlines established by the statement, and the approach proposed which involves a wise positioning on the paths of the political crisis in the country.

Without doubt, the authority in Bahrain perceives Sheikh Qassim as a challenging figure (a "difficult number") that cannot be surpassed. The authority has formed an understanding – through previous decades of meetings with Sheikh Qassim and data gathered around him – that the latter has a steadfast national position, a great and sincere sense of humanity, and cannot be subjected to underestimation nor accountability. However, the government's



practical steps are still slow, and many questions arise around the mechanisms necessary to start procedural steps towards restoring confidence between the various parties, and achieving real progress in this regard.

In this context in particular, and given its centrality within the fragments of the government and the opposition alike, the statement of Sheikh Qassim illuminates – albeit implicitly – that the complexity of the positions on Bahrain, both internally and externally, and in light of the different visions and trends, should not prevent from achieving an initial goal, which is creating “harmony” between the authority and the opposition. The statement asserts that with this harmony, “the conflict between the people, or the nation, and the government will not cease to exist. However, this will be the beginning of serious cooperation aimed at retrieving the nation to its state of wellness, repairing the damages caused by the conflict, and restoring the losses. From there, building and reconstructing human dignity and land begins, to the greatest extent possible, the land revives, and human becomes happy”.

Condemning the incitement to continue the conflict: a betrayal and crime

Naturally, the thrust of the regional crisis plays a pivotal and active role in the present and future of Bahrain on more than one level. This is exemplified, for instance, in investing, highlighting, and installing the sectarian (Sunni-Shiite) conflict on the margins of the political crisis in the country. In this context, the statement of Sheikh Issa Qassim establishes a foothold for taking a firm stand against any role that neighboring countries might have in “maintaining this conflict and these hardships and losses”. This firm position is clearly manifested in the statement, which expresses a strong condemnation of such a role, and calls for confronting it as a “betrayal” and a “crime”, considering any party that would be involved in maintaining the conflict and benefiting from it – be it the “government or others” – is an “enemy” since it would be destroying the existence of the entire nation.



The Dilemma: Exclusion

the Solution: Active Participation

Regarding the description of the internal scene in Bahrain, the statement of Sheikh Issa Qassim is based on the state of “political exclusion” and its devastating effects on the country. The statement considers that this exclusion is the main reason generating the most significant and central problem to the political crisis in the country, which is “the absence of justice in the government’s treatment in terms of politics, human-rights, judiciary, economics, society”. Accordingly, the statement calls for the exclusion to be replaced by an “active political participation which people deserve, and which is supported constitutionally”. This participation would retrieve the state – despite the differences between its institutions and policies – to the right path that folds the page of the past with all its agonies and heads towards a new era based on building “the nation” and the “human dignity”.

Government's Responsibility: human dignity

The statement of Sheikh Qassim defines the most important responsibility of the government as being to respect the person, provide him with a [good] life, and secure his happiness, regardless of the areas of divergence between the ruling institution and the opposition. This is based on the vision upon which the statement is launched and says that: "the presence of any authority or government in any country is meaningless without the preservation of the humaneness of the human being". Accordingly, the task that the authority should be motivated and driven towards achieving is driving "the humaneness of the human being to the highest point of practical presence, maturity, and growth". This, undoubtedly, cannot be achieved without exiting the field of conflict, and the space of confrontation, and entering into another space that would be upheld on the basis of commitments before citizens, on top of which being the commitment of preserving active political participation and providing a decent life for all citizens without discrimination or unjust privileges.

For exiting the state of violations: harmony with the political task

The statement of Sheikh Qassim amplifies the forms of gross violations carried out in the country, and outlines the deficiencies and shortcomings that the ruling institution is responsible for, highlighting that these violations have resulted in depriving the Bahraini person of his dignity, and preventing him of his basic rights in politics, religion, and society, which led to an intensification of the internal conflict. Nevertheless, the statement sets a framework for the transition from this political conflict to a different atmosphere, which is the presence of harmony "between the politics and the natural tasks of any authority or government towards the people its rules, and the nation which it governs, and that task is serving the human dignity and the land, the present and the future".

In practice, this requires melting the "ice" of internal conflicts between the government and the opposition, based on the priority of (homeland/human dignity), which is not a matter of controversy among conflicting parties, and this is a priority which entails –

undoubtedly – a set of commitments and pledges to confirm the credibility of the government's commitment to them, and [commitment to] expressing them at different levels.

The statement of Ayatollah Sheikh Issa Qassim is substantial both in terms of the (content) and the (speaker). Even though a year has passed on the issuance of this statement, it continues to consist the basic structure of the forms of initiatives that Bahrain needs. In addition to that, it presents a guideline for what the path of the political crisis in the country should look like. Regardless of how different the mindsets of the influencing actors in the crisis are, among the ruling institution or the opposition, this statement saves much time and thinking for the various parties, especially in that it offers everyone what seems like an (open market) for constructive initiatives, in a welcoming atmosphere, for the common goals that are in the interest of Bahrain, and in the interest of the nation, and the human dignity.

Fourth: Appendices

A. A List of the statement's glossary most important terms and vocabulary

Vocabulary	Examples from the statement
Stability	Bahrain (...) needs stability in light of new correct" circumstances, and just relations between its people "and its government
Security and Independence	relations that would guarantee progress, prosperi-..." "ty, security, and independence
Honor – Dignity	relations that would guarantee progress, prosperi-..." "ty, security, and independence
Land – human dignity	"land revives and man becomes happy..."
Political Right	and all their rights, including their political rights..." "that are undeniable
Difficulties and confrontation	the immense difficulties that are a result of the on-" going confrontation will not cease to exist before this "confrontation ends
Battlefield	Any Bahraini subject, the government or others," who seek for this nation to remain an endless battle- field with accumulated hardships until its existence burns out bears responsibility for his crime and be- "trayal
Development and prosperity	relations that would guarantee progress, prosperity," "security, and independence
Change	a clear change in the authority's attitude, views," "and positions towards the people
Destiny	"and choosing their destinies..."
Losses	other countries who assist in maintaining this con-" flict, and these hardships and losses, are the primary actors that should be considered as enemies by this "nation and its people

Justice	the main problem is the absence of justice in the” “government’s treatment
Exclusion	What enables all this is the exclusion of people from” “...politics, and from all positions of authority
Reform – political participation	no serious reform of any of the situations, and no” viable treatment of any of the people’s problems will take place without replacing this with an active political participation which people deserve, and “which is supported constitutionally
Freedom	It is in contrast with the task [of the government],” and severely disavowed to humiliate people, de- prive them of their freedom, deny their right of de- manding for their politics rights, and to impose the “harshest penalties on them for doing so
Tyranny	One flagrant act of tyranny practiced by politics is” preventing people from tasting the fruits that they “have reaped
Corruption – terrorism – crime	architects of corruption, terrorism, and concealers” “of crimes
War	This is an all-out war on the people with the peo-” “ple’s money
Sedition	for igniting the fire of sedition between religious” “sects and different groups
Attrition	It is highly required for the conflict to end, for the” “.attrition to cease, and for the country to rest
Humaneness	the presence of any authority or government in any” country is meaningless without the preservation of “the humaneness of the human being
The Nation	serious cooperation aimed at retrieving the na-” tion to its state of wellness, repairing the damages “caused by the conflict
Harmony	it requires nothing more than harmony between the” politics and the natural tasks of any authority or gov- “ernment towards the people its rules
Sanctities	People’s sanctities and their sites of religious honor-” ability were not spared of the tyranny of politics, of its “violations, nor of its fierce tracking

B. The full text of the statement of Ayatollah Sheikh Issa Qassim on February 14, 2019

In the name of Allah, the most Compassionate, the most Merciful
And prayers and peace be upon our master Muhammad and his kind and pure family.

Our beloved Bahrain, our generous Arabic and Islamic homeland, needs stability in light of new correct circumstances, and just relations between its people and its government. It needs circumstances and relations that would guarantee progress, prosperity, security, and independence, and that would guarantee its dignified status. Such circumstances and relations necessarily require a clear change in the authority's attitude, views, and positions towards the people, by treating them with respect, recognizing their humanity and dignity, and all their rights, including their political rights that are undeniable in terms of religion, reason, rationality, or in the language of science, modernity, and contemporary international norms.

The immense difficulties that are a result of the ongoing confrontation will not cease to exist before this confrontation ends, and this confrontation will not end without establishing a new kind of relationship between the people and the government, which would recognize the people's role and authority in directing their lives and choosing their destinies, without having a reality imposed on them with hands other than their own, without their contempt, and despite their will.

Any Bahraini subject, the government or others, who seek for this nation to remain an endless battlefield with accumulated hardships until its existence burns out bears responsibility for his crime and betrayal. Also, other countries who assist in maintaining this conflict, and these hardships and losses, are the primary actors that should be considered as enemies by this nation and its people. Their word should not be heard, their vain speeches claimed to be advice should not be listened to, nor should their imposed wills [be followed].

Let us determine the main problem in Bahrain; the main problem is the absence of justice in the government's treatment in terms of politics, human-rights, judiciary, economics, society and in all dimensions, in addition to their restrictions on people in religious and scientific affairs. What enables these practices and facilitates them is the exclusion of people from politics, and from all positions of authority, and in this case no serious reform of any of the situations,

and no viable treatment of any of the people's problems will take place without replacing this with an active political participation which people deserve, and which is supported constitutionally.

People's sanctities and their sites of religious honorability were not spared of the tyranny of politics, of its violations, nor of its fierce tracking. The mosque, the Husseiniyah [Shiite place of worship], prayer, the ritual of Ashoura', the obligations of Khums and Zakat [forms of charity], and the religious institution, have all been attacked. The practice of religious preaching has also been tracked and restricted to a great extent.

Essentially, the presence of any authority or government in any country is meaningless without the preservation of the humanness of the human being in any population ruled by any authority, system, or government. The responsibility of any government is to drive the humanness of the human being to the highest point of practical presence, maturity, and growth, it is also responsible for promoting the honor and dignity of the people under its rule, lifting their levels of effectiveness and positive, benevolent production, and developing their lives in all aspects required for their comfort and dignity.

Every government is a servant for its people's moral and material interests, otherwise it would lose its justification for existence. The great calamity takes place when politics is in contrast with the people's moral and material interests. People's loss of security goes against the government's task, and practicing this in the name of preserving security is a terrible form of deceit. It is in contrast with the task [of the government] and severely disavowed to humiliate people, deprive them of their freedom, deny their right of demanding for their politics rights, and to impose the harshest penalties on them for doing so. One flagrant act of tyranny practiced by politics is preventing people from tasting the fruits that they have reaped, preventing them from the goods of their land, forbidding them from enjoying the products of their efforts, and employing its people's efforts in terrorizing them, torturing them, and turning their lives into an endless cycle of misery and an unbearable hell.

How can it not be a terrible act of tyranny, and severely disavowed for politics to spend people's own money on building prisons for them, importing disastrous weapons, deadly toxins, brutal mercenaries, and importing torturers with sly consciences and sick spirits, as well as importing architects of corruption, terrorism, and concealers of crimes, and in supplying media outlets that are misleading, criminal, deceiving, and who spread ignorance, torment security and morals, and are anti-religion.

This is an all-out war on the people with the people's money that they have earned with their hard-work for [investing them] in their values, morale, comfort, and well-fare.

Another manifestation of the animosity of politics towards the people and its harshness against them is investing large budgets and malicious plans, purchasing dead consciousness for igniting the fire of sedition between religious sects and different groups, dividing people's unity, and rupturing them apart in a way that exhausts them all and guarantees the brutal politics [of the government] that a unified opposition against it would not erupt.

All those loyal to Bahrain, among its citizens and others, want it to rest from its internal hardships and its internal conflict that has lasted for too long, exhausted extensively, and produced extreme damages on the nation, on its unity, and on its human dignity; and which did not cease, but rather continues to exhaust and cause severe damages.

It is highly required for the conflict to end, for the attrition to cease, and for the country to rest.

Meeting this goal is the responsibility of the authority and the government, and it requires nothing more than harmony between the politics and the natural tasks of any authority or government towards the people its rules, and the nation which it governs, and that task is serving the human dignity and the land, the present and the future of the people and the nation, when its presence is derived out of the nation's will, consent, and approval.

With this harmony, the conflict between the people, or the nation, and the government will not cease to exist. However, this will be the beginning of serious cooperation aimed at retrieving the nation to its state of wellness, repairing the damages caused by the conflict, and restoring the losses. From there, building and reconstructing human dignity and land begins, to the greatest extent possible, the land revives, and human becomes happy.

As for you, Oh honorable people of Bahrain, [you are] on the path of honor, glory, dignity, progress, success, and attaining the good aspirations, high goals, and achieving victory in all domains as long as you remain on the path of your Islam, its values, its law, and its goals; and as long as you embody its morals, commit to its precepts, imitate its messenger and its Imams, peace be upon them, and return to its scholars. You are on the path of honor, victory, and glory, as long as you work for the sake of Allah, while abiding by His commands and [avoiding his] prohibitions, seeking the honor of His religion, aiming at implementing justice in His world, keen on the goodness of His servants, loyal to the human dignity of your homeland, to the human dignity of the nation, and to the human dignity – to every human dignity, {and honor belongs to Allah, and to His Messenger, and to the believers}

Issa Ahmed Qasim
February 14, 2019 A.D.

Bahrain Interfaith
مركز البحرين للحوار والتسامح

