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In defence of 'moral exemplar' on Bahrain

February 3, 2012 by [admin](#) [Leave a Comment](#)

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Dear Editor,

It is with some sadness that I comment on two recent letters in *Irish Medical Times* regarding the tragic situation in Bahrain (*IMT*, January 13, 2012, <http://bit.ly/wKawzG>). I believe your readership deserves to know a little more about the authors of same.

The first was from the Bahraini lobbyist Dr Omar Al-Hassan, former ambassador to the Arab League in London. His abortive attempts to have Charles Haughey start an Irish-Arab bank via Senator Noel Mulcahy in 1980 were revealed in State papers published

here in December 2010. He also formed the Gulf Center for Strategic Studies in London, where he is the current Chairman.

The second letter was from Mr Mohammed Al-Muharraqi, a lecturer in RCSI Bahrain and member of staff at the BDF military hospital in Bahrain (<http://bit.ly/xCYw5n>). That hospital had to operate on a friend of mine, Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja, former President of the Bahrain Center for Human Rights and former Mid-East Protection Coordinator with Frontline Defenders in Blackrock.

Abdulhadi was abducted and beaten until comatose on April 9, 2011, following his return to Bahrain. The regime denied that he was injured during interrogation. However, his broken mandible was fixed at that military hospital in Manama.

We have credible reports that Abdulhadi was chained to his bed in the BDF hospital and was comatose for weeks. He still cannot open his mouth properly, according to his family.

Abdulhadi's picture is currently displayed proudly on a 2,500sqft banner on a building on St Stephen's Green. He is one of Ireland's bravest human rights defenders. He remains in detention in Bahrain having received a life sentence in a military court. His daughter Zainab Al Khawaja, who was also assaulted and subsequently arrested, has continued to expose the daily brutality of the regime in Bahrain. Her husband is also incarcerated and her sister is in exile.

Both letters respond to articles written by Prof Eoin O'Brien. He accompanied me to Bahrain in July 2011. Our delegation, which included MEP Marian Harkin, Senator Averil Power and signatory to the Good Friday Agreement Mr David Andrews, found and reported on heinous human rights abuses, including the militarisation of hospitals by government militia, torture, including sexual assault, of consultant surgeons and physicians, senior lecturers and tutors, including some working at the RCSI Bahrain, medical students and nurses, ambulance drivers and porters.

Our efforts greatly annoyed many within the Bahrain regime and many pro-government lobbyists and loyalists. Our efforts also greatly annoyed and 'distressed' some closer to home.

The Bahraini regime paid for their own investigation into events via a Royal Commission of Inquiry. Contrary to Mr Al-Muharraqi's assertion that this was a UN-style commission, it was anything but. In fact, the royal inquiry had a number of fatal breaches of the standards of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, specifically:

1. The commission was not established by the principle of 'national choice';
2. Selection of members of the commission was by the King and not by or from the wider society;
3. There was no formal consultation with NGOs, despite the assertion by the UN High Commissioner that national NGOs have a key role in any truth commission; and
4. The usual role of the UN in establishing and assessing such truth commissions was circumvented.

IMT POLLS

Do you favour the suggested €5 GMS patients' visitation fee?

- ▶ Yes
- ▶ No
- ▶ Undecided

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Nevertheless, the Bassiouni report confirmed what we had reported, and the Bahraini regime was forced to admit to serious breaches of human rights.

However, little has changed in Bahrain. For instance, despite the fact that the report declared weapons charges against Salmaniya medics "unfounded" (para 84) those medics still face those charges in a prolonged and utterly shameful legal battle to void lengthy sentences already handed down by a military court prior to the release of the report itself.

The truth, as they say, is out. The truth is available for all to see on Twitter and Facebook and YouTube. Recent events speak to the truth in Bahrain. For instance, the deportation of Dr Richard Sollum of Physicians for Human Rights and Mr Brian Dooley of Human Rights First from Manama Airport, despite the reassurance of Bahrain's Foreign Minister Sheikh Khalid Al Khalifa that NGOs would have "unfettered access" to Bahrain.

The recent assault of Nabeel Rajab, Chairman of the Bahrain Center for Human Rights, and the deaths of numerous innocent people by CS gas suffocation, the detention of dentists, teachers, journalists, university students and anyone who dares speak out against the regime all speak to the reality of life in Bahrain today.

The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay has called for the unconditional release of all detainees imprisoned by military trial. In reality, the regime continues to delay the appeal trials of those accused, including the trials of Irish-trained surgeons Ali Al Ekri and Bassim Dahif.

Society in Bahrain is not split by religious beliefs, as Dr Al-Hassan suggests. It is split by fear; a fear emanating from a brutally oppressive element within the regime — a fear which suppresses normality and facilitates conscienceless, corrupt and dangerous behaviour by individuals and organisations.

As I write this letter, more sad news has emerged from the village of Sanabis, of a mother who died by self-immolation in protest at the assault and detention of her son in April. Her death is another act of frustration and despair in a land where brave men and women of good will are punished for speaking out; where ordinary people live in fear.

I disagree with the opinions and assertions of these two previous writers, but I would defend their right to make such comments in our free press, in our free and democratic land. Many millions have died to secure the democracy and freedoms codified in the Geneva Conventions and International Declarations of Human Rights. Those countries that sign up to those conventions must respect them. Sadly, such freedoms of expression and assembly are not available in Bahrain today.

Prof O'Brien was recently described by Robert Ballagh as a national treasure. He is, in my opinion, a moral exemplar; one willing to speak up for the oppressed and vulnerable despite the cost, personal or professional.

His reports are neither "insufficient" nor "inaccurate". If they were, he would not attract the attention of lobbyists and loyalists.

Prof Damian McCormack, FRCS Orth,
69 Eccles Street, Dublin.

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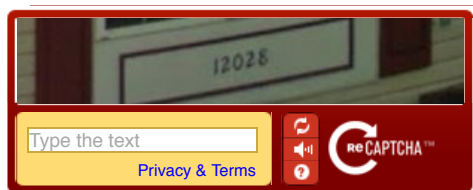
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