

foreign nationals residing in Bahrain.<sup>752</sup> The Ministry of Foreign Affairs also reaffirmed the right of foreigners to security, stability and work in Bahrain and the Ministry has indicated that it will take measures to financially compensate the victims of such attacks.<sup>753</sup>

## **2. Findings and Conclusions**

1525. The Commission found sufficient evidence to establish that some expatriates, in particular South Asian workers, were the targets of attacks during the events of February/March 2011. The Commission finds that four expatriates were killed by mob attacks during the events and many were injured.

1526. Pakistanis, in particular, were the target of attacks owing to their membership of some of them in the BDF and police force. Various neighbourhoods where expatriates live in Bahrain were the subject of sporadic attacks. The attacks on expatriates created an environment of fear, resulting in many of them leaving their homes and living in shelters. Other foreign nationals relayed to the Commission that they feared leaving their homes, attending services at their places of worship, or going to work. This caused many foreign nationals economic loss because they were fearful of returning to work and opening their businesses. The attacks on South Asian expatriates also resulted in hundreds of Bangladeshis, Pakistanis and Indians fleeing the country.

1527. There is a high degree of mistrust of immigrants by the Shia community, partly because they are perceived to be a threat to the job market for Bahrainis, and partly because of their membership in the security forces. The employment of naturalised individuals in the country's Armed Forces, National Guard and various law enforcement agencies has, provoked racial and sectarian strife and sometimes xenophobic sentiments towards foreigners. This has been exacerbated by the involvement of those forces in what has been thought to be repressive tactics during the period of unrest

## **3. Recommendations**

1528. To develop educational programs at the primary, secondary and university levels to promote religious, political and other forms of tolerance, as well as promote human rights and the rule of law.

### **Part B – Attacks on the Sunni Community**

#### **1. Factual Background**

1529. The first direct confrontation between the Sunni and Shia communities took place on 3 March in Hamad Town. By the end of the

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<sup>752</sup> Bahrain Ministry of Foreign Affairs, <http://www.mofa.gov.bh/Default.aspx?tabid=65&language=en-US> accessed 4 October 2011.

<sup>753</sup> See Chapter XI on Measures and Remedies Undertaken by the Government.

incident, 11 individuals had been injured including three police officers. The exact sequence of events and the circumstances remain unclear. The available information indicates that the spark for the confrontation was a fight between Shia university students, who had been participating in demonstrations during the day, and teenagers from naturalised Sunni families residing in the area around Hamad Town. The situation quickly escalated, and by 21:30 a street battle had erupted between Shia and Sunnis. Those involved were armed with sticks, knives, swords and metal rods. Most of the confrontations occurred in the vicinity of Roundabout 7 in Hamad Town, although reports indicated that clashes spilled over into neighbouring streets and alleys. At this point, the MoI dispatched riot police units, who intervened to stop the clashes and disperse the crowds. The events triggered a feeling of mistrust between the two communities and the protests subsequently assumed a more sectarian aspect.

1530. Further confrontations occurred in the area around Hamad Town on 4 March. Reports received by the Commission indicated that unidentified individuals targeted private vehicles parked in the area, especially those that had pictures of the political leadership of Bahrain or posters supporting the GoB. Later that morning, individuals bearing knives and wood planks were seen attempting to reach the roundabout. But they were denied access to the area by police. Several incidents of assaults on persons and damage to private and public property were also reported. For example, at 04:30 a complaint was filed alleging that four armed individuals assaulted a person in the Al-Takheem area of the Al-Sokheir district. Later, at 06:30, a car parked at the Oma Khayam Hotel in the Al-Qodaybeyya district was attacked. At 07:30, unidentified individuals damaged a traffic surveillance camera in the Sheikh Khalifa bin Salman road in the Buri area. At 15:30 a group of almost 200 individuals was reported roaming the area and damaging private property. This deterioration in the security situation led residents in the area to begin carrying arms. Later that night, reports indicated that four individuals had been severely wounded and hospitalised after being assaulted by groups of unidentified individuals in the area. The tensions between the communities escalated as public rhetoric became stronger, and speeches were made at the GCC Roundabout referring to historical battles between Sunni and Shia.

1531. A further confrontation took place on 7 March between members of the Sunni and Shia communities. Individuals who had gathered at the Financial Harbour began to interfere with traffic on the King Faisal Road. A female member of the Sunni community was stopped by protesters while driving her vehicle. The protesters then attacked her vehicle with sticks and knives. The car was surrounded by a large number of demonstrators, who began pounding on the vehicle and chanting anti-government slogans. Fearing for the safety of the woman, other demonstrators and some police officers intervened to push back the crowd and allow the car to pass. In an attempt to get away, the car struck and injured one of the protesters, who was subsequently hospitalised. This incident caused mass anger among the demonstrators who vowed to retaliate against the woman and her family. Later that evening, the woman's address was circulated via SMS messages

and on internet social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook, and there were calls for people to attack her residence. In response, hundreds of Sunni men wielding swords, knives, sticks and other weapons assembled at the woman's house to protect her from possible assault by Shia groups. This incident intensified sectarian tensions and contributed to a heightened sense of a deterioration of security in Bahrain.

1532. A confrontation between protesters and pro-government supporters took place on 13 March 2011 at the University of Bahrain Campus. Conflicting reports indicated that between 10 and 100 individuals were injured, and the description of events varied greatly between reports. Official reports released by the GoB indicate that protesters burst onto the University of Bahrain campus and started to attack pro-GoB students, and that the S20 building (English language school) was set on fire. The events allegedly resulted in the injury of tens of Sunni students with bladed weapons. Many of the injured students were in a serious condition and had to be hospitalised.

1533. On 15 March 2011, members of the Sunni community set up checkpoints and formed neighbourhood watch groups known as "popular committees" to protect their respective areas. They were mostly armed with sticks and bladed weapons. These committees set up 24-hour watches to ensure the safety and security of their respective neighbourhoods.

1534. The Commission received 434 complaints from members of the Sunni community. These included claims of physical abuse, verbal abuse and threats to personal safety. The majority of complainants claimed to have suffered emotional distress caused by these violations or inconveniences. Some complainants stated that they were expressly targeted because of their religious affiliation. In addition, the Commission received complaints concerning damage to private property and Sunni mosques.

1535. The Commission received reports provided from the GoB,<sup>754</sup> independent organisations<sup>755</sup> and international and national human rights organisations.<sup>756</sup> Its investigators held meetings with government officials and leaders of Sunni communities.<sup>757</sup> The Commission conducted interviews with 434 complainants and received documents from various sources including political parties and civil society organisations.<sup>758</sup>

1536. The Commission received 102 complaints regarding physical abuse and 120 complaints regarding verbal abuse suffered by individuals who

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<sup>754</sup> Reports received from the MoI, MoE, MoH, CSB, MoL, Ministry of Municipalities, BDF and NSA.

<sup>755</sup> Reports received from Al Menbar Democratic Society, National Democratic Labour Society and Al Wefaq.

<sup>756</sup> Reports received from Bahrain Society for Human Rights, Bahrain Center for Human Rights (BCHR) and Bahraini Transparency Society.

<sup>757</sup> Commission investigators met with the official spokesman for Karama, Abdulla Al Malaki on 12 September 2011 and the official spokesman for Gathering of National Unity, Dr Adel Abdulla on 11 August 2011.

<sup>758</sup> Gathering of National Unity, Al-Menbar El-Islami, and Karama Groups submitted reports on the alleged violations suffered by the Sunni community.

claimed that they were targeted because they were Sunni. Several individuals testified to having witnessed the physical assault of other Sunnis. One witness stated that his colleagues arrived at work covered in their own blood due to attacks by protesters on the way to work. Several individuals claimed to have been the victim of armed assaults. One individual stated that he was attacked by protesters with a knife outside SMC. Another individual was attacked by protesters carrying swords near Roundabout 7 in Hamad Town. He stated that he injured his hand when attempting to prevent the attack and he presented a medical report to the Commission in support of that claim.

1537. The Commission recorded 258 complaints of abuse directed at members of the Sunni community at universities and schools. The majority of these complaints concerned the events at the University of Bahrain on 13 and 14 March 2011. Both the parents of students<sup>759</sup> and students themselves claimed to have been verbally and physically attacked due to their religious affiliation and their refusal to participate in the ongoing protests.<sup>760</sup> In one case, the Commission received video footage that supported the claim of an individual being brutally beaten at the University of Bahrain campus. He was accused of being a Sunni thug hired by the GoB.<sup>761</sup> The Commission was shown a video by the BDF depicting a young girl being slapped and beaten by her classmates.

1538. One individual described the physical, verbal and psychological abuse to which she was subjected by other students at her school. She also complained about discrimination from teachers and verbal harassment of Sunni students. She stated that she felt scared to go to school and that she and her family feared for their safety. Another individual was attacked with a knife at school by a Shia student. When he went to tell the school supervisor about the incident, he was kicked out of the school. Another individual was beaten severely when she held a picture of HM King Hamad at school. Upon leaving school, she was attacked from behind and rendered unconscious. She was also verbally abused by her teachers. The discrimination affected her grades and her psychological state. She was not able to sleep at night and her mood was low.

1539. Investigators recorded approximately 83 cases concerning sectarian threats in schools and universities. Witnesses stated that students were verbally abused and harassed by other students as well as by teachers and staff of the school or university that they attend. One student was verbally assaulted and threatened by other students for refusing to join demonstrations. She was also verbally assaulted by a school supervisor and was refused permission to make a telephone call to her parents. She had to be taken to hospital because of poor health and was beaten by other students on her way out of the school.

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<sup>759</sup> This was alleged in particular in the area of Hamad City.

<sup>760</sup> Evidence supporting such claims was presented to the Commission on 22 September 2011 by the BDF.

<sup>761</sup> See Section Chapter VII, Section C on Dismissals of Students and Suspensions of Scholarships.

1540. Another individual stated that she and her Sunni classmates were harassed and verbally abused by Shia students and teachers because of their loyalty to HM King Hamad and to Al Khalifa. There were claims that a number of teachers encouraged students to protest, to harass Sunni students, to insult HM King Hamad and the Khalifa family and to call for the fall of the regime. One complainant said she wanted to counter this so she raised a picture of the King. She was then attacked by a school nurse, who grabbed her by the arm and punched her in the face. The nurse also tore up HM King Hamad's picture and threw it on the floor, as well as verbally insulting her and HM King Hamad. This individual declared that she would never be able to tear HM King Hamad's picture from her heart, at which point the nurse beat her again. This individual also stated that Shia teachers carried sharp objects such as scissors, nail clippers and nail files, and were waving them around. She submitted a medical report concerning the injuries sustained on her face and filed a complaint against the nurse in Hamad Town police station.

1541. The Commission received a number of complaints that Sunnis had been subjected to verbal abuse and threats to their safety. The Commission received complaints regarding deliberate provocation and threats in predominantly Sunni residential areas. A number of families sought refuge in safer areas. Physical attacks on homes were recorded. One individual stated that her home was attacked by protesters and stones were thrown at members of her family. For safety reasons, she abandoned her home for a month and changed where she worked and her children's school. Many individuals claimed that they were forced to stay behind closed doors for weeks until it was safe for them and their families to go outside. They claimed that this was inconvenient for it led to a shortage of supplies and food, which caused health problems for infants and the elderly.

1542. The Commission also received statements reporting that red marks were painted on houses to identify them as homes of military personnel or as employees of the MoI. This was allegedly done to facilitate attacks by Shia groups. The Commission received photographic evidence showing residences marked in this way. In addition, one individual stated that protesters put a sign on the building in which he resided to indicate that both civilians and police personnel working for the MoI resided there. Another individual claimed that she was so scared that she and her family left their residence and relocated to another district. Yet another individual reported receiving threats through social media such as Facebook and Twitter. Several other complainants stated that their lives were threatened over the telephone and by SMS. Such threats concerned their relationship to the regime, Al Khalifa family or naturalised citizens.

1543. The Commission received statements from complainants who were mistakenly identified to be relatives of members of the security forces. One complainant reported that she and her friend had been kidnapped by a group of demonstrators near her home because the kidnappers believed that she had relatives in the military. The complainant alleged that the kidnappers threatened her and her friend with a knife and told them they would be set on fire. She believed that this was retaliation for the arrest of a poet affiliated



with the demonstrations. The complainant stated that when her kidnappers realised they had to pass through a security checkpoint, they released her and her friend and left them on the side of the road, but told her that they would return to kill her. She reported that she and her family were forced to move from their home out of fear.

1544. There were also several complaints concerning damage to public and private property owned or used by Sunnis. Some protesters allegedly targeted the property because it had links with the Sunni community. The Commission received a number of complaints concerning damage to cars, alleged to have been targeted because they belonged to Sunnis. One individual stated that his car was vandalised and his tyres punctured, posing a threat to his life. Several individuals stated that their cars were attacked by protesters while driving; these included reports of protesters beating on the cars while verbally abusing the driver. The Commission investigators also received several complaints of attempted arson while the driver was inside the vehicle. One individual stated that four masked men poured gasoline on his car, which almost caught fire.

1545. Several individuals stated that their private businesses were targeted by protesters. One complainant stated that his restaurant, located in Budaiya, was threatened and attacked. A group of masked people had threatened to damage the restaurant if it did not shut down. Two days later the group came back and broke into the restaurant through the back door. They were carrying sticks and they beat up the employees, who suffered deep cuts and fractures. The complainant reported that he suffered severe material damage as a result of the attack and he attached supporting evidence to his complaint.

1546. There was an attempt to blow up gas cylinders near the Sunni Waqf Board<sup>762</sup> building on 16 March 2011 and near Yateem mosque on 15 March 2011.<sup>763</sup> The Commission also received statements alleging that Shia had attacked and vandalised several Sunni mosques.<sup>764</sup> Some mosques had to close due to the presence of protesters, forcing the visitors to pray elsewhere. An incident at the Fatima mosque in Hamad Town was reported on 18 March 2011 and earlier on 2 March on Umm Al Hassam mosque. There were also reports of the closure of other mosques, namely Muayar bin Shaypa mosque in Sitra on 16 March 2011 and Salman bin Mattar mosque in Daer village.<sup>765</sup> Some complainants also stated that they avoided praying in mosques because they feared being attacked. Some members of the Sunni community thus said that their freedom to practise their religion had been infringed.

1547. The Commission received approximately 25 complaints of discrimination and harassment in the workplace. One individual stated that she was harassed at work by her colleagues; she was called a thug and

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<sup>762</sup> An inalienable religious endowment in Islamic law, typically denoting a building or plot of land for Muslim religious or charitable purposes.

<sup>763</sup> Report of the Gathering of National Unity submitted to the Commission, which included pictures of gas cylinders thrown near the Sunni Waqf and the Yateem Mosque.

<sup>764</sup> Report of Gathering of National Unity submitted to the Commission.

<sup>765</sup> Report of the Civil Committee for Documenting 14 February Incidents covering 14 February–20 March 2011 [on file with the Commission].

sectarian comments were directed to her. Another individual stated that her father faced a lot of pressure at work from people from the Shia sect, forcing him to resign. This resulted in financial difficulties and the loss of property and savings for the family.

1548. The Commission received 359 complaints concerning emotional distress, including general complaints about the distress and disturbance to everyday life caused by the protests as well as complaints that protesters expressly targeted Sunnis. Several students complained of psychological harm due to physical and verbal harassment on school premises. One complainant stated that she was harassed and hit on the head by a Shia student, and due to the events she suffered from anxiety and emotional distress and refused to go to school. She refused to leave the house and had problems sleeping. Her family also received threats from Shia because of their good relations with naturalised citizens.

1549. Members of the Sunni community stated that the threats and violence directed towards their community had a negative psychological impact on their children. One individual stated that her children began to ask whether the teacher, grocer or driver was Sunni or Shia. Several reports were made concerning children who were affected by the turmoil to the extent that they were too anxious to fall asleep and began to wet their beds and have panic attacks.

1550. The Commission received several allegations concerning the attacks on the Sunni community during February/March by Karama Society. One of the main allegations concerned the physical and verbal attacks on Sunnis, expats and naturalized citizens, especially during the events at University of Bahrain on 13-14 March. Karama Society alleged that because of the violent nature of the protests, security forces had to intervene and put themselves between the protesters and the targeted communities. They argued that the protests in Bahrain were not peaceful. Claims were made that the protests were of a sectarian nature, and not about reform.

1551. During the Commission's meeting with the gathering of National Unity allegations were made that the Sunni community is misrepresented in media and that international media is not neutral but sides with the Shia community, considering them victims of discrimination and abuse, while in fact the Sunni community is subject to discrimination. The Commission received allegations concerning the events at Bahrain University on 13 March, where protesters allegedly vandalized and attacked the university premises. Pictures were presented of destroyed classrooms and smashed computers, as well as classroom floors with blood stains. A report presented by the Gathering of National Unity states that it had received 6981 complaints from the Sunni community, 72% of which alleged emotional distress caused by the protests.

1552. The Commission received complaints from members of the Khalifa family and tribe whose last name is Al Khalifa. They claimed to have been exposed to emotional distress and psychological terror throughout the protests. They also stated that they were not involved in politics and were terrified for

the safety of their family and their own with slogans and the threats such as “Death to Al Khalifa”, and threats to hang members of the Khalifa family from bridges. The death threats were chanted, voiced over the telephone and sent via SMS to members of the family, and written on public and private property around the country.

1553. The Commission received complaints that during the time that SMC was alleged to have been “hijacked”, hospital staff discriminated against Sunnis. Complainants reported physical abuse by SMC staff, denial of medical care and intentional medical negligence. The Commission received around 40 complaints alleging deliberate denial of medical care and medical negligence involving Sunni patients at SMC. One complainant testified about the denial of medical care to his sister and other Sunnis. Another stated that her father had chronic renal failure and used to have a regular renal dialysis at SMC. He was scheduled to have a renal dialysis at SMC but was denied admission to the hospital. The complainant called SMC to arrange an ambulance to transfer her father to another clinic, but her request was denied. Another individual stated that her right of access to health care was denied when she was refused medication for diabetes. She believed that the refusal had a sectarian motivation.

1554. There were other complaints alleging medical negligence. One witness stated that a disabled retired government employee was brought to SMC during its alleged takeover. He was moved from the Intensive Care Unit to the short stay clinic, where he died due to medical negligence. Another witness testified about a cancer patient who was denied chemotherapy because he was Sunni.

1555. Some members of the Sunni community also made complaints concerning the inconvenience that the protests caused them and their families. For example, they referred to difficulty in accessing medical care, the closing of schools and economic deprivation. There were several complaints regarding the difficulty in getting to work due to the protests, roadblocks by protestors and fear for personal safety.

1556. The Commission received complaints from 66 members of the Sunni community about misrepresentation in both the national and international media. They claimed that Shia journalists in Bahrain tended to exaggerate harm suffered by Shia, while downplaying or neglecting harm to Sunnis. The complainants considered this to be an example of discrimination. They said that the international media portrayed the Shia community as victimised which was inaccurate and that this biased portrayal damaged inter-sectarian relations. It gave rise to bias against Sunnis and gave Shia a justification to commit violence against Sunnis. Such complaints also included allegations that members of the Sunni community were targeted by social media. Some complainants’ names were posted on the internet and they were accused of being pro-GoB, while others received direct threats through Facebook and Twitter.



## **2. Findings and Conclusions**

1557. The Commission found sufficient evidence to support the finding that Sunnis were targeted by some groups of demonstrators, either because they professed loyalty to the regime or on the basis of their sect. Sunnis were subjected to physical attacks and attacks on their property as well as harassment. Many of these incidents occurred at schools and makeshift checkpoints operated by civilians. These attacks were sufficient to create an environment of fear and mistrust that exacerbated tensions in a country already polarised.

1558. The Commission found that members of the Sunni community were subjected to verbal harassment during the protests. Such verbal abuse took place in the streets, in the workplace and in schools and universities, and mainly focused on the perceived loyalty of Sunnis to the regime and the Khalifa family. The Sunni community was seen as a target due to the perception that all Sunnis are agents or supporters of the GoB and the ruling Al Khalifa family.

1559. It appears that the Sunni community was threatened and targeted throughout the protests. In some cases there were direct threats to the lives and welfare of Sunnis. In addition, the Commission recorded evidence supporting the claims that Sunni residences were marked during the protests. However, there was nothing to suggest that these residences were indeed targeted after being marked. Arguably such methods could have been used to intimidate members of the Sunni community.

1560. The complaints by Sunnis alleging denial of medical care and intentional negligence were supported by a number of witness statements from doctors, patients and members of the patients' families.

1561. The Commission finds there was damage to both private and public property during the protests of February/March 2011. With regard to the vandalised cars, the Commission could not establish that such acts were based on sectarian motives. The lack of security and the general breakdown of law and order that prevailed during the period in question were conducive to vandalism. However, the Commission received several statements confirming the use of sectarian language and threats while the vandalism was taking place, thus confirming a sectarian motive in at least some cases.

1562. Nevertheless, the Commission is of the view that in situations of riots, strikes and the breakdown of law and order, disruptions to daily life are inevitable. These exceptional situations also have negative and sometimes serious effects on the freedom of movement, access to work and public services, business, etc. The Commission finds that such negative effects materialised during the period in question. The Commission however is of the view that such general negative effects impacted everyone in Bahrain and were not specific to one community.

### **3. Recommendations**

1563. To develop educational programs at the primary, secondary and university levels to promote religious, political and other forms of tolerance, as well as promote human rights and the rule of law.