

BAHRAIN 2021 HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Bahrain is a hereditary monarchy. King Hamad Bin Isa Al Khalifa is the head of state and holds ultimate authority over most government decisions. The king appoints the prime minister, the head of government, who is not required to be a member of parliament. In November 2020 the king appointed his son, Crown Prince Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa, as prime minister, following the death of the incumbent. The prime minister proposes ministers, who are appointed and dismissed by the king via royal decree. The cabinet, or Council of Ministers, consists of 22 ministers, of whom seven are members of the ruling Al Khalifa family. The parliament consists of an upper house appointed by the king, the Shura (Consultative) Council, and an elected Council of Representatives, each with 40 seats. The country holds parliamentary elections every four years, most recently in 2018. Representatives from two formerly prominent opposition political societies, al-Wifaq and Wa'ad, could not participate in the elections due to their court-ordered dissolution in 2016 and 2017, respectively. The government did not permit international election monitors. Domestic monitors generally concluded authorities administered the elections without significant procedural irregularities.

The king is supreme commander of the armed forces, and the crown prince is deputy commander. The Ministry of Interior is responsible for internal security and oversees the civilian security force and specialized security units responsible for maintaining internal order. The Coast Guard is also under its jurisdiction. The Bahrain National Guard is responsible for internal threats. The chief of the National Intelligence Agency (previously the National Security Agency) is appointed by royal decree and reports to the prime minister. The agency has arrest authority, but reportedly did not conduct arrests during the year. Civilian authorities maintained effective control over the security forces. There were credible reports that members of the security forces committed some abuses.

Significant human rights issues included credible reports of: torture and cases of cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment by government; harsh and

inadequate safety procedures, worker ignorance of safety procedures, and inadequate safety standards for equipment. The level of freedom foreign workers enjoyed directly related to the type of work they performed.

A Ministry of Labor order requires employers to register any living accommodations provided to employees. The order also mandates minimum housing standards for employer-provided accommodations. Of the 14,000 labor accommodations, 62 percent of them were in unauthorized areas. Many migrant workers lived in unregistered accommodations that included makeshift housing in parking garages, apartments rented by employers from private owners, family houses modified to accommodate many persons, and single beds for rent. Conditions in the many unregistered or irregular worker camps were often squalid and overcrowded. Inspectors do not have the right to enter houses or apartment buildings not registered as work camps to inspect conditions.