

# Bahrain: Seasonal Violations during Ashura Season

1443 AH – 2021 AD



جمعية الوفاق الوطني الإسلامية  
AL-Wafaq National Islamic Society



# **Bahrain: Seasonal Violations during Ashura Season**

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This report monitors the violations that the Bahraini security authorities were involved in against citizens during the Ashura season, as part of the restriction on religious freedom.

**Al-Wefaq National Islamic Society**

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## **Background:**

Bahrain has a population of 1.5 million approximately<sup>1</sup>, with 789,273 of them being foreign workers and expatriates. Official statistics indicate that Muslims make up 70% of the population, while Christians, Jews, Hindus, Sikhs and other religions make up the remaining 30%. Non-official estimations say Shiites make up 60% to 70% of Muslims in Bahrain whilst Sunnis make up 30% to 40%.<sup>2 3</sup>

Due to this bilateral diversity, Bahrain has been known – historically – for its religious tolerance between the sects. This tolerance has been demonstrated through the respect of the religious rituals that the Shiites hold during the annual Ashura commemoration of Imam Hussain (pbuh). Every year, Shiites declare the mourning of Imam Hussain bin Ali, who is the grandson of the Prophet Mohammed (pbuh) and the third Shia Imam. The mourning commemoration is manifested in various ways such as: open lectures and mourning, processions and marches, and hanging black flags and banners on main streets, ma'tams and homes. The banners symbolize grief and mourning, and they usually bear religious slogans and hadiths attributed to the Prophet (pbuh) and the Imams of the Shiite sect. It has become a custom among citizens to place black banners on public streets, homes and ma'tams<sup>4</sup> for hundreds of years.

Considering the historic depth of these rituals, and based on Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights regarding the freedom and manifestation of religion and the practice of rites<sup>5</sup>, the national law explicitly ensures the Shiites' exercise of religious rituals in the 1973 and 2002

constitutions. Article 22 of the 2002 constitution states, "The State guarantees the inviolability of worship, and the freedom to perform religious rites and hold religious parades and meetings in accordance with the customs observed in the country."<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, the Penal Code states in Article 311, "A punishment of imprisonment for a period not exceeding one year or a fine not exceeding BD 100 shall be inflicted upon: any person who deliberately causes disturbance to the holding of religious rituals by a recognized sect, or to a religious ceremony or meeting or obstructing such events or preventing the holding thereof [...]."<sup>7</sup> Bahrain also declared the ninth and tenth of the Hijri month of Muharram an official holiday so the Shiites can exercise their rituals.<sup>8</sup>

Nonetheless, Bahrain's modern history tells that the Shiites in Bahrain have been discriminated against and marginalized by the authorities even before the establishment of the State in 1970. This had a direct negative reflection on the Shiites right to exercise their religious rituals. With the eruption of the repeated political crises across its history, Bahrain widened its violations against its Shiite community. In the most recent crisis, and which erupted in 2011 and continued till today, the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry found (in paragraph 1306) that the authorities demolished 38 Shiite mosques amidst the crackdown on the nationwide pro-democracy protests on 14th February 2011<sup>9</sup>. The authorities' violations against and restriction of the Shiites' right to practice their religious rituals have not stopped since.

## **Violations during Ashura 1443 AH:**

Coinciding with the commemoration of Ashura in many Shiite regions across the world, at the beginning of each Hijri year, Bahrain has not been keen to promote itself as a country that practically endorses coexistence and religious tolerance with the Shiite Muslims or improves conditions for religious freedom. Shiites suffer from persecution in various fields, starting with arbitrary arrests, job discrimination, exclusion from the media, and inflammatory sectarian rhetoric, and not ending with the government's continuous failure to hold accountable those responsible for the violations directed against the Shiite community since 2011.

The Ashura commemoration is only an example of the restriction on religious freedom for the Shiites, and the loss of religious tolerance with them. During our monitoring of the violations that occur during the past years, the Bahraini authorities deliberately sabotage and confiscate the black banners; arrest preachers, reciters and funeral officials, or summon them to security centers to investigate the content of their religious speeches and poems, and attack mourning processions with tear gas bombs. This means that the official authorities have turned the Ashura season into an opportunity for seasonal violations for purely political reasons.

## Summons:

The cases of summonses during the Ashura season reached more than 100, the Nîmes of (21) are known, in addition to the summoning of the committee based on mourning processions in the Hamad Town, roundabout 17.

Summons(21)						
Date	Details	Gender	Age	Region	Name	No.
2021/08/12	Was summoned to Hooraa Police Station for interrogation on charges related to reviving Ashura rituals	Male	+18	Al-Sanabes	Orator Mahmoud Al-Qallaf 18+ 08/12/2021	1
2021/08/12	Was summoned to the Hooraa police station for interrogation on charges related to reviving Ashura rituals	Male	+18	Damistan	Orator Saleh Sahwan	2
2021/08/13	Was summoned to Hooraa Police Station for interrogation on charges related to reviving Ashura rituals	Male	+18	Hooraa	Orator Hassan Nowrouz	3
2021/08/13	Was summoned to the Hooraa police station for interrogation on charges related to reviving Ashura rituals	Male	+18	Karzakan	Ali Mansour al-Mallah	4
2021/08/13	Was summoned to the Hooraa police station for interrogation on charges related to reviving Ashura rituals	Male	+18	Karzakan	Muhammad Mahdi Dhaif +18	5
2021/08/13	Was summoned to investigate the content of the sermon	Male	+18	---	Sheikh Muhammad Riash	6
2021/08/15	Was summoned to Muharraaq Police Station	Male	+18	Bani Jamra	Sheikh Abdul Mohsen Mulla Attia Al-Jamri	7
2021/08/17	---	Male	+18	Al Dair	Fadel Hammad (head of Imam Ali's Ma'atam	8

2021/08/18	<p>Was summoned to Hooraa Police Station for interrogation on charges related to reviving Ashura rituals in the Sanabis area</p> <p>-Was interrogated and forced to sign a pledge</p>	Male	+18	sanabis	<p>Ali Muhammad Al Abbas</p> <p>+18</p> <p>Male</p>	9
2021/08/18	<p>Was summoned to Hooraa Police Station for interrogation on charges related to reviving Ashura rituals in the Sanabis area.</p> <p>Was interrogated and forced to sign a pledge</p>	Male	+18	---	<p>Hussein Ali Muhammad Ashour</p>	10
2021/08/18	<p>Was summoned to Hooraa police station for interrogation on charges related to reviving Ashura rituals in the Sanabis area</p> <p>Was interrogated and forced to sign a pledge</p>	Male	+18	---	<p>Kazem Ibrahim al-Mahdi</p>	11
2021/08/18	<p>Was summoned to the Hooraa police station for interrogation on charges related to reviving Ashura rituals in the Sanabis area.</p> <p>Was interrogated and forced to sign a pledge</p>	Male	+18	---	<p>Muhammad Abd al-Halim Fardan</p>	12



2021/08/18	<p>Was summoned to Hoorā police station for interrogation on charges related to reviving Ashura rituals in the Sanabis area.</p> <p>Was interrogated and forced to sign a pledge</p>	Male	+18	---	<p>Ali Ahmed Mahdi</p> <p>-</p>	13
2021/08/18	<p>Was summoned to Hoorā police station for interrogation on charges related to reviving Ashura rituals in the Sanabis area</p> <p>-Was interrogated and forced to sign a pledge</p>	Male	+18	---	<p>Yusuf Ahmed Mahdi</p>	14
2021/08/18	<p>Was summoned to Hoorā Police Station for interrogation on charges related to reviving Ashura rituals in the Sanabis area</p> <p>-Was interrogated and forced to sign a pledge</p>	Male	+18	---	<p>Ahmed Khalil Zain Al-Din</p>	15
2021/08/18	<p>-Was summoned to Hoorā police station for interrogation on charges related to reviving Ashura rituals in the Sanabis area</p>	Male	+18	---	<p>Sadiq Abdul Wahed Marhoon</p>	16

	-Was interrogated and forced to sign a pledge					
2021/08/18	---	Male	+18	Al Dair	Faisal Al-Momen (Chairman of the General Authority for Al-Dair's Funeral Processions)	17
2021/08/19	-Was summoned to Samaheej Police Station due to his participation in the Zanjil procession in the Deir area	Male	+18	---	Orator Al-Sayed Ahmed Al-Alawi	18
2021/08/22	was summoned to Hamad Town Police Station Al-Dawwar 17	Male	+18	---	Orator Mahdi Sahwan	19
2021/08/22	Was summoned to the police station 08/22/2021	Male	+18	---	Sheikh Hani Al-Bana	20
2021/08/22	Wummoned to the police station	Male	+18	---	Sheikh Aziz Al-Khadran	21

## Security Forces Violations:

The no. of violations by the security forces during the Ashura season reached (45) cases, distributed as follows: (2) cases of sabotaging Ashura manifestations, (12) cases of confiscating Ashura banners, and (31) cases of provocative practices.

<b>Violations by Security Forces (45)</b>				
<b>No. of violations</b>	<b>Details</b>	<b>Violation type</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Region</b>
<b>1</b>	A provocative practice Police in civilian clothes filmed a group of young men as they were installing black banners and Ashura manifestations	A provocative practice	2021/08/03	Karana
<b>1</b>	Confiscation of property Removal of the Ashura banners located near the cemetery	Confiscation of property	2021/08/05	Bani Jamra
<b>2</b>	-The arrest of a group of young men while they were assembling Ashura rituals in the Budaiya Police Station and then released after hours of arrest -Arresting Asian shop owners and threatening them not to sell the Hussaini youth who instal Ashura manifestations (According to a report by the Raids Monitoring Network)	A provocative practice	2021/08/07	Duraz
<b>1</b>	Removal of Ashura banners and signs located near the cemetery	Confiscation of property	2021/08/08	Hamad Town Roundabout 4
<b>1</b>	Removal of Ashura banners and manifestations	Confiscation of property	2021/08/08	Damistan
<b>1</b>	Removal of Ashura banners and manifestations	Confiscation of property	2021/08/08	Al-Malikiyah
<b>1</b>	The government forces the Jableh Habshi Ma'tam to remove a sign reading "Yazid is an immoral man who drinks alcohol."	A provocative practice	2021/08/09	ablet Habshi
<b>1</b>	The security forces stood next to the Maqabah Ma'tam on the night of the first of Muharram, as part of the series of restrictions on religious freedom	A provocative practice	2021/08/09	Maqabah
<b>1</b>	Members of the security forces filmed the Al-Hussainiyi Statues Square, located near the Jaber Al-Alawiyat roundabout	A provocative practice	2021/08/09	Al-Musalla
<b>1</b>	Members of the security forces in a car stationed at the cemetery arrested some young men who participated in the Ashura councils and demanded their IDs	A provocative practice	2021/08/10	Sanabis
<b>1</b>	Removal of Ashura banners and signs at the entrance to the town	Confiscation of property	2021/08/10	Diyah

1	Removal of Ashura banners and manifestations	Confiscation of property	2021/08/10	Musalla
2	2021/08/10 - Filming participants in Ashura rituals -Deploying security forces in front of the Ma'tam, where Ashura commemorations are held	Provocative practice	2021/08/10	Ras Rumman
1	Removal of Ashura banners and manifestations	Confiscation of property	2021/08/11	Al Bilad Al Qadwwm
1	Removal of the pillar on which the Ashura banners and manifestations were hung	Confiscation of property	2021/08/11	Musalla
1	Removal of Ashura banners and manifestations	Confiscation of property	2021/08/11	Sitra - Wadyan
1	Monitoring the mourners	Provocative practice	2021/08/12	Sanabis
1	Photographing the mourners	Provocative practice	2021/08/12	Al-Musalla
1	Civilian patrols spread in groups on the public street and pursue mourners leaving the area to register their personal databases	A provocative practice	2021/08/13	Sanabis
1	Removal of banners reading "Peace be upon you, O Abu Abdullah Al-Hussein"	Confiscation of property	2021/08/14	Ras Rumman
1	Property damage Sabotage of Ashura manifestations	Property Destruction	2021/08/14	Mahooz
1	Contacting the heads of ma'tams in the region to prevent them from running processions under penalty of legal prosecution	A provocative practice	2021/08/14	Al-Musalla
1	Sabotage of Ashura manifestations on Street no. 14	Property Destruction	2021/08/14	Musalla
1	Removal of Ashura banners and manifestations	Confiscation of property	2021/08/14	Tubli
1	Removal of Ashura banners and manifestations	Confiscation of property	2021/08/15	Hamad Town
2	2021/15/08 -Contacting the directorate of Salmabad Ma'tam to force it to obstruct the mourners and threaten them not to hold a mourning procession -Members of the security forces surround the mourners at the	A provocative practice	2021/08/15	Salmabad

	Salmabad ma'tam to prevent from holding a procession -The presence of security personnel in civilian clothes to obstruct mourners coming from outside the area and registering their cars' numbers and IDs			
1	Photographing the mourner at the Karbabad ma'tam	A provocative practice	2021/08/16	Karbabad
1	Contacting the directorate of the Karzakan ma'tam twice to force it to hold the funeral procession in the vicinity of the ma'tam	A provocative practice	2021/08/16	Karzakkan
1	The attack on a procession in the Sayed Khadija neighborhood by armed civil forces and the arrest of the two young men, Ali Mansour Al-Mallah and Muhammad Mahdi Deif, then releasing each of them on bail of 100 dinars	Provocative practice	2021/08/16	Hamad Town, R 4
1	Photographing citizens participating in the mourning ceremony near the school	Provocative practice	2021/08/17	Sanabis
1	Members of the security forces in civilian clothes monitoring citizens participating in the mourning procession	A provocative practice	2021/08/17	Sar
1	The security forces monitor Al-Zanjiel mourning procession	A provocative practice	2021/08/17	Al Diar
1	Filming the central mourning in the area	A provocative practice	2021/08/17	Abu Quwa
1	Filming the houses that provide food during the days of Ashura	A provocative practice	2021/08/18	Karbabad
1	Photographing mourners near the ma'tam of the central region	A provocative practice	2021/08/18	Karanah
1	Filming the central mourning procession	A Provocative practice	2021/08/18	Maqabah

1	A provocative practice Filming a civilian sit-in demanding the immediate release of political detainees	A provocative practice	2021/08/18	Sanabis
1	Filming the funeral procession	A provocative practice	2021/08/19	Al qaryah
1	Preventing a funeral procession from the Bin Salloum ma'tam for security reasons	A provocative practice	2021/08/20	Manama
1	Monitoring participants in Ashura rituals	A provocative practice	2021/08/21	Aali
1	The arrest of a group of mourners at the Sanabis ma'tam, who parked their cars in Al-Wahda Square and asked for their personal IDs	A provocative practice	2021/08/21	Sanabis
1	Photographing the participants in the Zanjil procession	A provocative practice	2021/08/22	Al Musalah

## Arbitrary Arrests:

The cases of arbitrary arrests in the Ashura season are (3) citizens after calling them to investigation and then released. It is noted that both citizens Mansour al-Malah and Mohammed Mehdi Diaf were released on bail of 100 BD.

Table of arrests(3)							
Details	Release date	Date of arrest	Gender	Age	Region	Name	No
summons note	2021/08/16	2021/08/13	male	+18	Karzakan	Ali Mansour Al Mallah	1
summon note	2021/08/16	2021/08/13	male	+18	Karzakan	Muhammad Mahdi Dhaif	2
summon note	2021/08/18	2021/08/17	male	+18	Al Dair	Fadel Hammad head of Imam Ali's Ma'tam	3

## Mass Violations in Prisons:

To restrict religious freedoms, Jaw Central Prison's administration has collectively violated the right to practice religious rites during the Ashura season (twice) in both buildings No. 5 (Wall 2) and No. 12.

Table of the mass violations in prisons(1)				
No of violations	Details	Date	Prison	No
1	Denial of the prisoners of conscience in Building 12 (formerly Building 23) of religious rites by foreign mercenaries	2021/08/06	Jaw Prison	1
1	Denial of the prisoners of conscience in Ward 2 Building 5 (formerly Building 20) of religious rites by the beginning of Muharram nights	2021/08/10	Jaw Prison	2

## Mass Protests in Prisons:

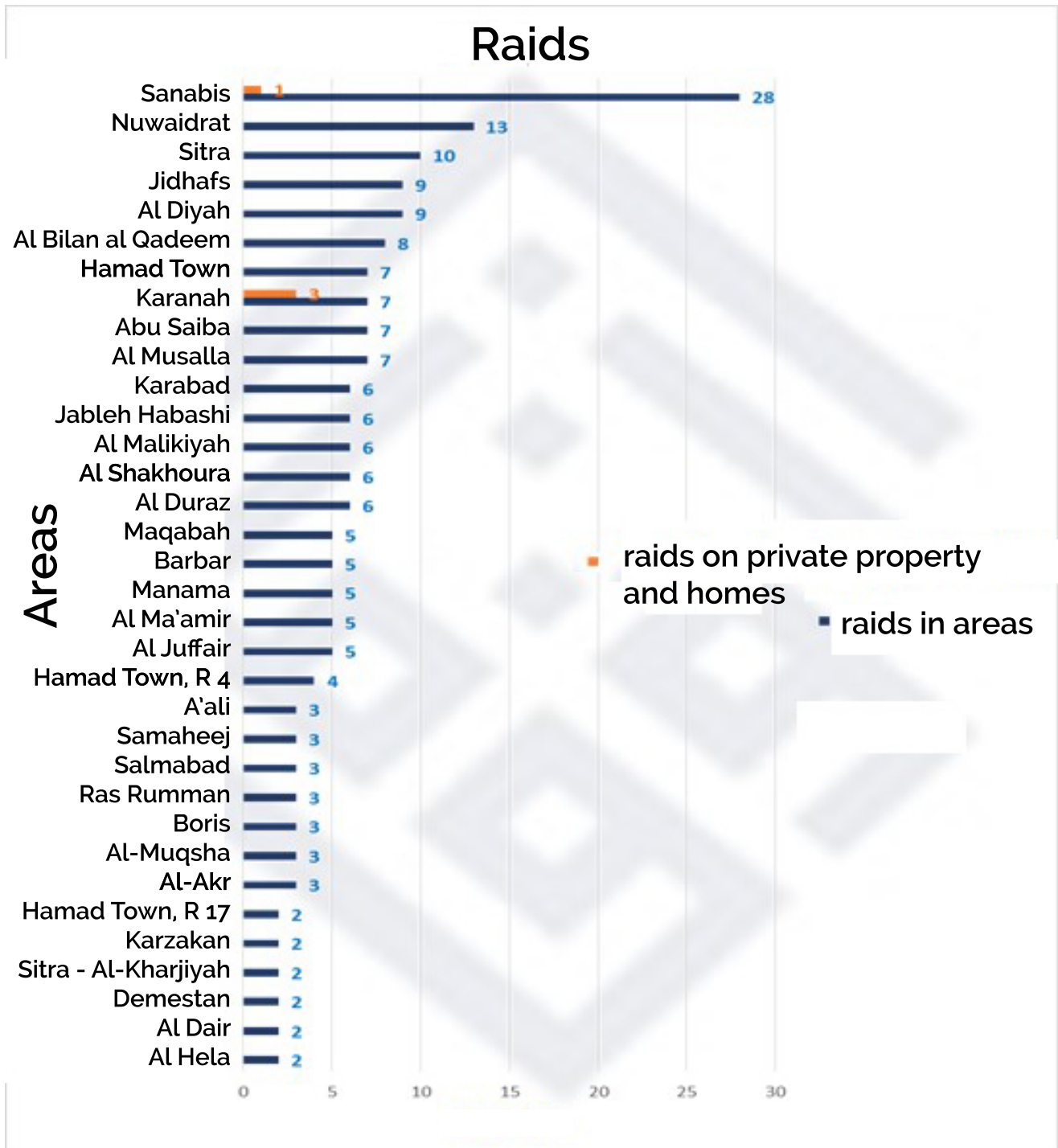
The two cases of mass violations in prisons were followed by 2 mass protests by detainees in Buildings No. 5 (Ward 2) and No. 12, denouncing the deprivation of the right to practice religious rites they were subjected to.

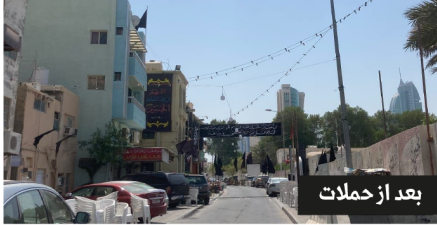
Table of the mass protests in prisons(2)				
No of protests	Details	Date	Prison	No
1	The prisoners of conscience in Building 12 (formerly Building 23) began a peaceful sit-in and shouted 'Allahu Akbar' to protest their denial of religious rites	2021/08/06	Jaw Prison	1
1	The prisoners of conscience in Ward 2 Building 5 (formerly Building 20) began a peaceful sit-in to protest their denial of religious rites, followed by threats from the building's officer, Ahmed Sultan, to force a riot squad to forcibly break up the sit-in	2021/08/10	Jaw Prison	2



## Raids in Residential Areas:

The cases are (213) raids in (50) areas with the aim of provoking citizens and spreading terror through motorized security convoys.







## **Results and Recommendations:**

Al Wefaq in this report has reviewed the violations of the Bahraini authority against religious freedoms during the commemoration of Ashura 1443 H, (monitored during between 3 - 25 August, 2021). According to indicators reflected in the figures and cases under this report, the Bahraini authorities have continued to exercise the same blatant violations against religious freedoms for Shi'ite Muslims, which was monitored by the department, local and international human rights organizations in previous reports. The following are the detailed results of the report:

The Bahraini authorities are still violating, the right of Shiite Muslims to practice their religious rites relating to the annual commemoration of Ashura, in violation to the right of freedom of belief and freedom of expression guaranteed in articles 18 and (19) of the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, because of a large part of them from the opposition.

The Bahraini authorities has deliberately confiscated and sabotaged Ashura manifestations under the pretext that go against the customs, despite they are guaranteed by article 22 of the 2002 Constitution related to the practice of religions rites.

The Bahraini authorities have limitless powers that enable them to arbitrarily interpret article 22 of the 2002 Constitution related to the religious rites and meetings; in addition to the arbitrary restrictions imposed by international law on belief and expression.

The Bahraini authorities have used its powers to investigate and purchase citizens as means of intimidation and punishment against religious preachers and orators, in a bid to restrict the Shiite Muslims' rights of belief and expression, guaranteed by the International Covenant on Civil Rights.

The Bahraini authorities, through its official and government, have manipulated media as a means of brighting their image to the local and international audiences as respectable for religious freedoms on the one hand, and on the other hand to impose further restrictions and tightening on Ashura revival ceremonies. Notably, the newspapers have published statements for personalities without their permission, adding that the official media does not provide professional and balanced media coverage of the Shi'ites' Ashura commemorations. The National Institution for Human Rights has failed to condemn the violations against religious freedoms of Shiite Muslims during Ashura commemoration.

## **Accordingly, Al-Wefaq calls:**

1- The Bahraini authorities to cease their repressive practices, which violate the religious freedoms of Shiite Muslims, and impose further restrictions on freedom of expression.

2- The Bahraini authorities to respond to the request of the visit the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression at the United Nations, which dates back to November 14, 2014, to find out about the violations of the right of Shiite Muslims to express their religious opinions and beliefs.

3- The Special Rapporteur on religious freedom at the United Nations to submit a request for a visit to Bahrain to find out the Bahraini authorities' violations against Shiite Muslims.

4- The international community and human rights organizations to exercise a pressing role, by addressing the Bahraini authorities to stop the violations related to the confiscation and restriction of freedom of belief and freedom of opinion and expression committed against Shiite Muslims.

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1-<https://alwatannews.net/article/929362/Bahrain/%D8%B9%D8%AF%D8%AF-%D8%B3%D983%%D8%A7%D986-%%D8%A7%D984%%D8%A8%D8%AD%D8%B1%D98%A%D986-%%D98%A%D8%B9%D988%%D8%AF-%D984%%D984%%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%AA%D981%%D8%A7%D8%B9-%D8%A8%D986%%D8%B3%D8%A8%D8%A912-%%D981%%D98%A-2020>

2- Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry Report (Para. 43).

3- In the current situation, the opposition cast doubt on the appreciation of ratio of Shiites compared to Sunni due to consideration of what it calls (illegal naturalization processes for political goals) carried out by the Bahraini authorities to change the demographic composition to turn the Shiites to minority, where the majority of the Shiite population belongs to the opposition.

4- Ma'tam: Religious hall used for the revival of religious services and events and other special affairs special to Shiites and it has a similar sacredness to Mosques.

5- International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (Article 18)

6- Constitution of Bahrain 2002 and Constitution of Bahrain 1973.

7- The Penal Code

8- Bahrain public holidays ordinance

9- Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry Report (Para. 1306).



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