

Middle East Solidarity

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Jerusalem: whose capital?



Comment

A struggle for existence

Trade union activists in Egypt are keeping their movement alive, says Fatma Ramadan

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Miriam Scharf unpicks claims of 3000 years of Jewish sovereignty



Palestinian volleyball players, Gaza **by @KareemN96**

Yards from the Israeli border, Palestinians take part in a match during the Great March of Return protests in April 2018. The men's t-shirts bear the slogan "Return is a right, rights are power".

Kareem is a human rights activist, translator, photographer and report living in Gaza.

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About us

Events in the Middle East often dominate the news, but it is war, sectarian violence and western military intervention which grab the headlines.

Middle East Solidarity shows a different side to the region.

We report on resistance to repression and imperialism from Morocco to Yemen, covering the strikes and protests which are missed by the mainstream media.

We carry the voices and stories of the women and men who are still fighting for bread, freedom and social justice to new audiences.

Our practical guides to campaigning and resources for activists aim to build a stronger solidarity movement.

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Find out more here:
www.menasolidaritynetwork.com
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Human rights at the crossroads

The Bahraini government and its Western allies are using the rhetoric of human rights to cover up ongoing abuses and repression, **Ben Carlow** explains.

On Wednesday 21 February 2018, Bahraini human rights activist, Nabeel Rajab, was sentenced to 5 years in prison for tweets published in 2015 for “insulting a statutory body” and “disseminating false rumours in a time of war”. This is in addition to the 2 years he is currently serving “for spreading false news and rumours about the internal situation in a bid to discredit Bahrain.”

Nabeel Rajab is the President of the Bahrain Centre for Human Rights (BCHR), Deputy-General of the International Federation of Human Rights (FIDH) and is on the Board of Advisors for Human Rights Watch’s Middle East and North African (MENA) division. One of the most well-known human rights activists from the MENA region, he has won numerous international awards and has nearly 400k followers on Twitter.

Rajab has been imprisoned on numerous occasions since helping to set up BCHR in 2001 with colleague, Abdulhadi al-Khawaja, who is currently serving life in prison for his role in the 2011 uprising in Bahrain.

The sentencing of Nabeel Rajab and the jailing or exile of many other human rights activists contradicts the image of human rights “reforms” which the Bahraini authorities and their allies in the US and UK governments want to promote.

Following the 2011 uprising, which saw the killing of protestors by the security services in Bahrain, King Hamad al-Khalifa, established the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry to investigate human rights abuses. The Bahraini government has also engaged with the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) and undertaken a peer review process, has a former minister on the UNHRC advisory committee, and a new Arab Court of Human Rights is to be located in the country.

The British Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) spent approximately £3.87m on projects in the state between 2014-2016, which has assisted in the establishment of a police ombudsman, the National Institute for Human Rights (NIHR), a Special Investigations Unit and the Prisoner and Detainees Rights Commission. After the 2011 uprising, John Timoney, former Chief of Police in Miami, and John



Nabeel Rajab
Photo: Wikimedia Commons

Yates, a former Assistant Commissioner in the London Metropolitan Police were employed to assist in the reform of the police after protestors were killed during the 2011 uprising.

The human rights situation in the country has deteriorated since the 2011 uprising with continued deaths, repressive laws, and the dissolution of political opposition societies al-Wefaq and Wa’ad.

Recently, the government u-turned on one of the BICI recommendations, restoring arrest powers to the National Security Agency, an agency condemned by the report for its role in the torture of detainees in the aftermath of the 2011 uprising.

The US and UK governments continue to focus on defending Bahrain’s track record of “reforms”. Human rights conditions on US arms sales to Bahrain were dropped and a \$3.8 bn arms sale announced. Bahrain hosts the United States Naval Forces Central Command which includes the fifth naval fleet, and recently the UK has stationed a new a naval base, HMS Jufair, on the island.

It could be argued then, that human rights discourse has been used to reinforce the rights abusers’ position and legitimise the Bahrain government’s relationships externally with their Western allies. That is why some Bahraini activists have told me that they believe the whole discourse of human rights has been co-opted by the Western powers.

Ben Carlow is a pseudonym. Read more about Bahrain on pages 11-13





Bisco Misr workers protest
Photo: revsoc.me

‘Resistance is still alive’

Despite the difficulties of organising under intense repression, Egyptian trade unionists continue to fight back, says **Fatma Ramadan**

As May Day 2018 comes around the Egyptian government, in cooperation with corporate management, continues to imprison all those who dare to protest and demand their rights. Six employees of Bisco Misr were arrested on April 25 after police intervened to prevent the workers from entering the company and prevented food from reaching about 40 workers from the night shift who had refused to leave the company.

Crossroads

This May Day, trade unions in Egypt are also at a crossroads. The Trade Unions Law No. 213 of 2017 has been passed, followed by executive regulations of the law, issued by a decision of the Minister of Labour. This law severely restricts the right to organise, by setting impossible conditions for exercising that right, yet nevertheless resistance is still alive, as members of the independent unions are engaged in daily battles with government officials and management.

Various agencies, headed by the Ministry of Manpower, are trying to put more obstacles in the way of some unions while making easier for other

unions. But the question is, what kind of unions will be allowed to exist under these constraints?

Constraints

Will there be trade unions defending workers’ rights, or will they be unions of the government and the different agencies, especially the security forces? Is it possible to have freedom to establish trade unions and freedom to exercise their role in defending the rights of their members in a repressive political atmosphere? How can these unions defend the rights of their members under the strict restriction of the conditions of the strike, in the context of laws that criminalize this right, and the arrest of those who seek to exercise that right?

All these are questions that we will know the answer to in the coming months and years. But it is certain that the class struggle for the right to organise and the workers’ struggle for their rights, especially in light of their low wages and high inflation rates, will not stop. Even if it has retreated somewhat, it will return and rise again.

Mobilisation

What happened during the last eight years of mobilisation and attempts to establish unions which represent workers and defend their rights will continue to shake the ground under the feet of the old government trade union

federation. This is despite all the efforts to break the resolve workers leaders, shut down protest sites, and attack the leaders of the independent unions.

It is clear that the government and its various agencies stands with the old trade union leaders, which by extending their terms of office, or sending many of them to parliament on the electoral list “For the love of Egypt”. However, the trade union situation is not going back. Even the President of the government trade union federation seems to admit this. It is said he has been asking the Ministry of Labour not to accept the registration papers of independent trade unions, especially in the land transport sector.

Different stage

We are clear in at a different stage now, The old union leaders previously could rely on the government and the security services to maintain their positions, in exchange for full professions of loyalty. Maybe the agencies of the state are considering replacing them with new leaders, so that some of the unions will open up to some extent?

The title of this stage is the struggle for existence. What is new is that the old unions have become a party to this conflict, not the fledgling independent unions alone.

This is an excerpt from an article originally published in Arabic on the Bel-Ahmar website.

QATAR

A major step forward for workers' rights?

Bob Smith

On May Day the English language Qatar Tribune front page headline read, 'Qatar to become a model for Gulf states in labour reforms: ITUC'. The International Trade Union Confederation was praising Qatar for concluding a deal on workers' rights with the International Labour Organisation (ILO) which includes major commitments to reform the exploitative kafala system of employment for the 2.5 million migrant workers in Qatar.

The government has promised a long list of reforms, including measures such as lodging employment contracts with a government authority to prevent contract substitution, ending the practice of workers being forced to accept lower wage jobs after arriving in the country.

Workers will be free to leave the country without interference or authorisation from employers. The minimum wage will cover all workers, ending the race-based system of wage setting; ID cards for migrant workers will now be issued directly by the State of Qatar, rather than by employers. Without identification, workers cannot access medical treatment.

To resolve repeated examples of non-payment of wages the Ministry of Labour has established a fund to pay workers directly - and to offer flights back home if the employer has gone bust. The regime has agreed to recalculate



the national minimum wage in line with ILO standards based on the actual cost of living.

Although Qatar has not formally agreed to recognise trade unions, as the government has agreed to allow the establishment of workers' committees with elected representatives in each workplace. In addition, a special disputes resolution committee for grievances will be established.

The piecemeal steps at recognising worker representation were given a big boost over the May Day weekend. For the past year the Building and Woodworker International trade union federation (BWI) has been conducting safety inspections on the 2022 World Cup construction sites and accommodation blocks - and has successfully pushed for elected worker representation committees.

The BWI, ILO and the UK trade union, Unite, provided speakers for a state sponsored conference on Occupational Health and Safety, and a gathering of migrant

community representatives and activists, organised by the BWI, was addressed by the Qatari Minister of Labour who fielded questions for over an hour.

Reforms from above are being granted to fend off pressure from the international trade union movement

His answers were greeted enthusiastically by people who have been struggling for years to combat harsh exploitation. Anna, a Filipino domestic worker present and a leader of the domestic workers organisation was particularly pleased to hear the minister promise the provision of shelters for domestic workers to escape physical and sexual abuse: "It's not acceptable any more", she said.

Aarif, an Indian construction worker who has worked for 21 years in the Gulf, said, "This is a good opportunity for real change.

It's the first time we have ever managed to talk directly with the government. The fund for non-payment of wages is the best news but, more importantly, the BWI is now in the open."

Despite the formal ban on trade union organisation it is clear that Qatar is liberalising its labour laws. Genuine reforms from above are being granted to fend off continuing pressure from the international trade union movement (focussed primarily on the 2022 World Cup) and in order to project an international image of a progressive, liberal regime.

Qatar needs all the friends it can get to offset the economic and political blockade organised by Saudi Arabia and the rest of the Gulf states. The 'partnership' model of trade unionism promoted by the ITUC and ILO may open the door to real grassroots organisation among migrant workers - how far could this go?

Bob Smith is a long-standing trade unionist

PALESTINE

Protest movement defies Israel at Gaza border

Anne Alexander

Mass protests at Israel's highly militarized border with the Gaza Strip have highlighted the exclusion of Palestinians from their land, seventy years after the creation of the state of Israel. Thousands of demonstrators staged weekly marches calling for the right of return for Palestinian refugees and an end to the brutal siege of Gaza, which has been enforced by Israel for more than a decade.

The 'Great March of Return' has also highlighted Israel's siege of the Gaza Strip, which has suffocated under an almost total blockade since June 2007.

At the heavily militarised borders of Gaza, regular marches of unarmed protesters began on 30 March, six weeks before the marking the seventieth anniversary of the Nakba ("catastrophe" in Arabic), the founding of the state of Israel and the mass dispossession of the Palestinians.

Carrying Palestinian flags and banners with the symbol of the keys to the homes their grandparents were forced to leave, thousands of demonstrators have risked death and injury at the hands of Israeli troops on the other side of the border.

Israeli spokesmen portray the protests as a "terrorist" threat, organised by militant group Hamas. Yet the tally of casualties (see box, right) tells a different story. According to



Protests at Gaza's border
Photo: Al-Ra'y media

TOTAL PALESTINIAN CASUALTIES 30 March - 23 April Source: UN OCHA

Deaths: 39

Injuries: 5511

Total hospitalized injuries:

Adults: 2142

Children: 454

Men: 2466

Women: 130

Injuries by type:

Live ammunition: 1499

Other: 582

Gas inhalation: 408

Rubber bullets: 107

the UN, Israeli forces have used lethal force against unarmed civilians, causing thousands of injuries as they fire live ammunition into the crowds.

"Gaza's health sector is struggling to cope with the mass influx of casualties"

The huge numbers of casualties is putting even greater strain on an already-weakened health service, the UN Office for Coordination

of Humanitarian Affairs in the Occupied Palestinian Territories said in a report released on 24 April.

"Gaza's health sector is struggling to cope with the mass influx of casualties, due to years of blockade, internal divide and a chronic energy crisis, which have left essential services in Gaza barely able to function."

Lack of fuel completely closed the Gaza Power Plant for three successive weeks at the beginning of April, leading to rolling power cuts of up to 20 hours per day. This is "severely undermining the provision

of basic services, including health and water and sanitation", says UN OCHA.

Meanwhile, in the West Bank, protests in solidarity with the Great March of Return have also been attacked by Israeli forces who injured 330 Palestinian demonstrators, 49 of them children. Most of the injured were from the Nablus area, but attacks on protests were also reported in Ramallah and Abu Dis.

[Read more on campaigns in solidarity with Palestine on p22](#)

SYRIA

Airstrikes hit regime but money for aid goes short

MENA Solidarity

Western governments once again poured millions of pounds into funding military strikes on regime targets in Syria, while the basic needs of Syrian refugees in neighbouring countries continue to go unmet.

Just two weeks after hundreds of cruise missiles pounded regime bases in retaliation for horrific attacks on besieged civilians where chemical weapons are likely to have been used,



Syrian children in Northern Iraq
Photo: Mustafa Khayat via Flickr

UN officials in charge of channelling humanitarian relief to the 5.6 million registered Syrian refugees in Turkey, Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq and Egypt, warned that donors had only promised to cover 23 percent of the programme's costs for 2018/9.

At an estimated cost of £106m, the bill for weapons used in the US, UK and French joint operation striking an alleged chemical weapons base controlled by the Assad regime would

have more than covered the cost of the UN's April 2018 urgent appeal for £95m in funding for Syrian refugees' health care needs.

Meanwhile military intervention by a major US ally, Turkey, against the Kurdish enclave of Afrin led to a new wave of refugees, after Turkish-backed forces seized the town in mid-March. Nearly 140,000 residents of Afrin were forced to leave their homes as a result of the fighting, prompted by the

Turkish state's efforts to stop the emergence of a *de facto* Kurdish state on its southern border.

The fall of Afrin was followed by a major regime offensive against on opposition-held areas near Damascus in the Eastern Ghouta region. Thousands of the area's residents were evacuated to north-western Syria under a ceasefire deal between opposition groups and the regime.

According to local media reports, some of the incoming evacuees were offered the empty houses of Kurdish Afrin residents forced to flee by the Turkish offensive. Khalid al-Hassan said he did not want to take someone else's home so soon after having been forced to leave his own: "We are not accepting these houses for free without the permission of their owners," he told *SyriaDirect* website.

ITALY

Rallies in Italy mark "two years without Giulio"

Carlotta Mingardi

Protests in more than 100 towns across Italy on 25 January marked the second anniversary of the disappearance of Giulio Regeni, the Italian PhD student from Cambridge University who was kidnapped, tortured and murdered in Cairo in early 2016. This year's events took place in a changed political framework to the previous year: with Italian elections looming and the return to Cairo of the Italian

ambassador on 14 August 2017.

This was the context for the decision of the Democratic Party not to re-nominate Senator Luigi Manconi for president of the human rights commission at the Italian Senate. Manconi has been one of the most important voices demanding the truth in Regeni's case.

In a letter addressed to the Italian newspaper *Il Giornale*, Manconi clearly interpreted his missed re-nomination as a "precise political choice".

Despite this less-than-encouraging political atmosphere, where normalisation of the Rome-Cairo relationship seems to be the preferred road for all political parties, three important points were made on 25 January.

First that investigations will take place with 9 members of the Egyptian National Security Agency currently under scrutiny

and Regeni's file will finally be handed over to the legal representative of Giulio's family, Alessandra Ballerini.

Secondly, that the movement created around Amnesty International's campaign "Truth for Giulio" intends to keep demanding from the government the "entire, transparent truth about Regeni's murder."

"Who orchestrated it, who covered up the evidence and who side-tracked the investigations?"

Campaigners are asking "who orchestrated it, who covered up the evidence and who side-tracked the investigations?" as Amnesty spokesmen Riccardo Noury and Antonio Marchesi put it.

Finally, the family's lawyer, Alessandra Ballerini, emphasised the "moral responsibility" of all those

involved in Giulio's academic research to cooperate with the investigations, while stating that the people responsible for the kidnapping, torture, and murder of Giulio Regeni remain to be found in Cairo.

Two years after Giulio's disappearance, political participation remains strong, with various Italian newspapers adhering to the mission of "providing only fact-checked information about the on-going investigations" (the "scorta mediatica") to counter efforts for normalisation and keeping high the attention on Regeni's case.

However, the evident step back from the main political parties implies the movement is likely to have to rely upon its own strength in the near future.

[Read more about the London protest for Giulio Regeni on the back cover.](#)

‘Knowledge itself is suspect’



Mural, American University in Cairo
Photo: Anne Alexander

The Egyptian authorities’ fear of academic inquiry has led to tragic results, **Khaled Fahmy** argues.

Academic freedom is always threatened. Free press and free speech are the first to be threatened in moments of tension. In Egypt we have never seen such a dramatic hike in violence towards academics and students.

Just to share with you some statistics, the Association for Freedom of Thought and Expression (AFTE), one of the most articulate NGOs which researches violations of academic freedom, documented 1181 cases of arrests of students in the last three academic years. The majority of them (637) are Al-Azhar University students who have been arrested on very vaguely defined charges.

University administrations and the security forces also pressurise and intimidate academics. Mona Prince, an English Literature professor who teaches at Suez Canal University was suspended because she posted on her personal Facebook account a video that

she taped of herself dancing on the rooftop of her building.

Academics are also being prevented from travel abroad. There is an office in Egyptian universities called the Office of Survey and Information, which ostensibly is part of the Ministry of Higher Education but we know that it actually gets its orders from the Ministry of the Interior. This is the office that supposedly gives permits for university professors to leave the country to attend academic conferences. There has been a hike in the number of people who have been prevented from leaving according to this particular office.

The government interferes directly in research. In October 2015 the Minister of Higher Education issued a demand to private universities asking them to ban research that is deemed “insulting to friendly and brotherly nations.”

Even more seriously, Egyptian universities did not witness student union elections for two years between 2015 and 2017. The contentious issue or the pretext was the bylaws that govern the elections, including the rules on who has the right to nominate themselves in the elections. The student union elections in 2014 were won by

independent candidates who were not supported by the state, but were also not supported by the Muslim Brotherhood. The Minister of Higher Education refused to accept the results and new elections only took place in December 2017.

These attacks on academic freedom take place in a context where a huge segment of the population has decided to forgo basic freedoms in return for security and stability, turning a blind eye to many violations, such as the passing of Law 36 of 2014, which defined university buildings as vital and public entities.

This law, which was passed by Egyptian President Abdelfattah al-Sisi in the absence of parliament, allows these institutions to be protected by military police, and that is how students who participate in peaceful demonstrations on campus are now put in front of military tribunals.

The other important thing that curtails the independence of Egyptian universities is the presence of security forces on Egyptian campuses. For a short while Egyptian students managed to force security forces to withdraw in 2011, however after the coup they were reinstated. Now we also have

private security firms on campus, most seriously a firm called Falcon that is notorious in its very rough handling of students.

Egyptian security forces have the right to open offices, supposedly to protect buildings, but practically they monitor what happens in classrooms, they monitor student activities and they do arrest students from university campuses.

As academics we are suspects for what we do. We are considered spies. This is most tragically expressed in the Giulio Regeni case. This atmosphere affects foreigners in particular but also Egyptians conducting social science research.

Some would say that Giulio's case might have been particularly touchy because he worked on independent trade unions. I don't buy this because there is nothing particularly touchy about this topic.

A colleague of his, an Italian student working in Egypt managed to produce a dissertation and conducted research on the communist movement in Egypt in the 1970s and actually published a book which was even translated by the Egyptian national publishing house.

However the security forces that are now insidiously present in every place look at us with suspicion. Where did you learn Arabic? Who taught you Arabic? Why are you here?

For them, someone who has a fellowship, is learning Arabic, conducting research in Egypt on any matter; women, Copts, history of the Jews, history of the Nile, fourteenth century history of religious endowments in Cairo, nineteenth century history of marriage, history of the police, history of the judiciary, history of the Egyptian army, all these are suspect topics.

They are suspect because the production of knowledge itself is suspect.

Egypt is ruled now by a former head of military intelligence who thinks that information is to be protected; is to be vaulted, rather than published and disseminated.

Information is the crux of the power of the Egyptian state, and the power resides precisely in hoarding this information and banning people who disseminate this information.

So someone who has a foreign source of money, who comes to Egypt learning Arabic, who conducts research on these

Turkish state attacks academics

'B' explains why she had to flee her job in Turkey and escape to the UK after signing the 'Academics for Peace' statement calling for peace in Kurdistan

When I signed the petition I was a lecturer in Turkey. After the publication of the petition the university management launched an administrative investigation into the signatories of the petition at our university.

Then, without finishing the investigation, management dismissed me and some other signatories who were working in roles such as lecturers, research assistants, assistant professors by not renewing our contracts.

So I lost my job on 16 April 2016. Then judicial investigations were launched, accusing us of "terrorist propaganda."

Almost one year after losing my job, I came to London as a visiting fellow by the support of CARA (Council for

At-Risk Academics).

Ten days after I arrived, my passport was cancelled by the Turkish government under the state of emergency.

Academics who signed the peace petition were arrested, vilified in the media and some faced death threats both in person and online. Meanwhile President Erdoğan attacked us in hateful speeches, while judicial investigations were launched into the signatories.

Following a failed coup against Erdoğan in 2016, the government declared a state of emergency. This allowed the state to issue decrees to liquidate dissident groups in the academy and other public arenas and suppress dissent. At least 500 signatories to the peace petition have lost their jobs as a result. Academics in Istanbul

have also been put on trial on charges of "terrorist propaganda," where they are facing the threat of jail sentences between 2 and 7 and a half years. All the other signatories to the peace petition also face trial on the same charges.

Organisations which support academics at risk around the world such as CARA, Scholars At Risk (SAR) and the Philip Schwartz Scholarships have offered solidarity to academics in Turkey affected by the crackdown. But first and foremost our trade union in Turkey the Union of Education and Science Workers' (Eğitim-Sen), has been providing economic and legal support to academics and teachers who have lost their jobs on a large scale.

things and ends up writing a report or dissertation, is by this definition a spy. That is the danger of this regime, the regime that is inherently suspicious of information and of people who deal with information.

Academics should not be apologetic about what they do, and universities, whether the American University in Cairo or foreign universities like Cambridge and elsewhere should always push this agenda to say there is nothing suspicious about producing knowledge and in fact a country should be proud by more books produced about it.

We are governed by a regime that thinks that more books produced on Egypt, the more vulnerable its state and security is and, that is the mentality I believe that led to the tragic case of Giulio Regeni.

[Cambridge University PhD student was abducted and murdered in Cairo in January 2016 while conducting research on independent trade unions. Find out more about the campaign for justice on p20.](#)



This is Bahrain

How right-wing Zionists and Bahraini royals found themselves in each other

Behind a smokescreen of worthy rhetoric about religious diversity and tolerance, the Bahraini monarchy is forging connections with right-wing Zionists and Trump's evangelical Christian advisors, writes [Fahad Desmukh](#).

In December 2017, the news spread that a delegation of religious leaders from Bahrain was visiting Israel and Jerusalem at the same time that Israeli troops were shooting Palestinians protesting against Donald Trump's unilateral decision to recognise Jerusalem as the capital of Israel.

The delegation was made up of 24 members of a pro-monarchy organisation called *This is Bahrain*, who were purportedly sent by King Hamad to "send a message of peace".

The visit to Israel is the latest act in a strategy bringing together an unlikely set of bed-fellows, including the King of Bahrain, right-wing pro-Israel rabbis, an evangelical spiritual adviser to Donald Trump and a Scottish born campaigner who is more loyal to the Bahraini monarchy than the king himself.

It is a strategy which claims to be about religious tolerance, but is based on the intolerance for social justice that the regimes of both Bahrain and Israel base their rule on.

The news of the visit was met with widespread anger by Bahrainis and Arabs on social media, that an Arab country would send a peace delegation to Israel at such a time. PLO leader Hanan Ashrawi was quoted in the *Jerusalem Post* as saying the move was "the height of insensitivity":

Bahrain's state news agency later issued a statement distancing itself from the delegation, asserting that the visit was undertaken at the initiative of *This is Bahrain* alone, and that they do not represent any official state body. The facts however tell a different story.

The Bahrain Make-Over

In the aftermath of the pro-democracy movement in Bahrain, and bloody government crackdown in 2011, the Bahraini government and supporters of the Al Khalifa monarchy were eager to reverse the negative image of them that was presented in some of the Western media. It was, of course, just the negative image that they wanted to change — not the unflattering reality of autocracy, repression and torture in Bahrain.

Part of the strategy included throwing money at Western PR companies to try and do the white-washing. Clients and beneficiaries of the Al Khalifa regime also took their own initiatives to defend the monarchy, by presenting Bahrain as a liberal, diverse and religiously-tolerant country.

According to this narrative, it is only the enlightened King who stands in the way of these religious freedoms from being abolished by the radical

Shi'a extremists who would take over if a democratic form of government is allowed.

In order to push this narrative, attempts were made to politicise sections of Bahrain's large expatriate population, who until then had been largely forbidden from any form of expression on domestic politics. As a religiously and ethnically diverse body — and one that was already structurally beholden to the ruling regime — the expatriate community was perfect for the narrative of the apologists.

To this end, in June 2011 a selected group of expatriates were given an audience by King Hamad at his palace in a scripted event consisting exclusively of panegyric speeches. Despite the overwhelming majority of expatriates in Bahrain being brown-skinned working class South and Southeast Asians, the speakers at the event were all apparently rich white-skinned people with British accents, consisting of a British businessman, a British employee of Bahrain's police force, two British students, and a British spa and beauty school owner.

The spa owner, Scottish born Betsy Mathieson, would go on to become a primary apologist for the Bahraini monarchy around the world. As a result of the 2011 audience with King Hamad, the following year, the government approved the formation of the Bahrain Federation of Expatriate Associations (BFEA) headed by Mathieson. Its mandate includes: "representing its members in conferences and other events abroad and express opinions on topics referred to it by the ministry [of social development]".

The highlight of the BFEA's work has been an international roadshow named *This is Bahrain* sending delegations of people from Bahrain to Western cities. The delegations hold exhibitions, press conferences and meetings in the cities they visit to push the narrative of Bahrain's royally-cultivated diversity and religious freedom.

The delegations have been as large as 200 people, consisting of a mix of Bahraini citizens and expatriate residents and representing many of the various religious denominations existing in the country — but none of Bahrain's political diversity. The delegation members are always united in their overeager praise for Bahrain's government and monarchy.



Top: Signing the Bahrain Declaration
Bottom: Revd Johnnie Moore | Photos: YouTube

With the Blessing of His Majesty

It is not clear who is funding the BFEA's events and exhibition around the world, not to mention the \$2m cheque to the University of Rome. However it is clear that all of these events are happening with the full knowledge, blessing and logistical support of the King and senior government officials.

Most of the events are officially patronised by the King, Prime Minister, or other royal family member. Government officials and members of the royally-selected Shura Council are regularly part of the foreign delegations. The King's son, Nasser, seems particularly close to BFEA, having been deputed on multiple occasions to represent his father at *This is Bahrain* events.

The King and other officials regularly meet with Mathieson and the foreign delegations, to thank and praise them for their efforts. All of the BFEA's meetings, events and statements are covered by the state-run news agency and television channel.

Even before the peace delegation to Israel, the BFEA and *This is Bahrain* was reaching out to right-wing Zionist groups. During their visit to Washington in September 2015, the *This is Bahrain* delegation held a meeting with the staunchly pro-Israeli media monitoring group MEMRI.

The following day, Mathieson was quoted in a Bahraini newspaper claiming that *This is Bahrain* had signed a memorandum of understanding with MEMRI to "change negative media perception" about Bahrain. A few days later the vice-president of MEMRI wrote a blog post denying any such MoU, as well as lambasting the delegation not only for lying, but for not bringing serious talking points to the meeting:

It would be easy to chalk this farcical incident up to the frantic efforts of an expat businesswoman clumsily trying to correct the extremely negative image of her adopted homeland. But it is clear that the *This is Bahrain* roadshow is an attempt at public diplomacy embraced by the Manama government.

In February 2017, King Hamad

received at his palace American rabbis Marvin Hier and Abraham Cooper, the dean and associate dean of the Simon Wiesenthal Centre in Los Angeles. During their meeting, Hamad praised Bahrain's religious diversity and tolerance, while Hier hailed the king "as the Leader of Human Tolerance", according to a report by the state-run news agency. The king also praised the BFEA and *This is Bahrain* during the meeting, presumably because they played a role in arranging it.

The Wiesenthal Centre is also a fiercely pro-Israeli organisation. In 2016, it issued a list of the top ten worst global anti-semitic incidents, at the very top of which was former President Obama's abstention on a UN Security Council resolution condemning Israel's illegal settlement expansion in the Occupied Territories.

The Wiesenthal Centre celebrated the Trump decision to recognise Jerusalem as the Israeli capital last week. Marvin Hier has twice been named the most influential rabbi in the US by *Newsweek*, and this year he was invited to give a prayer at Donald Trump's inauguration ceremony. The noted scholar Norman Finkelstein wrote that the Centre "is renowned for its 'Dachau-meets-Disneyland' museum exhibits and 'the successful use of sensationalistic scare tactics for fund-raising'."

The February 2017 meeting appears to have laid the basis for the launch of the Bahrain Declaration on Religious Tolerance at the Wiesenthal Centre in Los Angeles in September last year. In his address, Rabbi Hier told the gathering "may the day come soon when His Majesty [King Hamad]'s plane lands at Ben-Gurion Airport".

Evangelical Trump Advisor

Another individual apparently involved in bringing the Bahrainis and pro-Israelis closer is US evangelical leader Rev. Johnnie Moore. He heads a spiritual advisory team to President Trump and also applauded his Jerusalem decision, stating that "Evangelicals in every corner of the United States will be ecstatic." He is also a former vice-president of the Liberty University founded by Jerry Falwell.

In April 2017 Moore visited Bahrain holding meetings with the Crown Prince and the labour minister while accompanied by BFEA leader Betsy

Mathieson. He was also involved in the Bahrain Declaration launch in September, during which he was interviewed by Bahrain's state TV, saying that Bahrain "will become the Switzerland of religion".

While addressing King Hamad in October, Mathieson gave special thanks to Moore for his role in developing the document. When the *This is Bahrain* delegation went to Israel in December 2017, Moore tweeted a photo with them, saying that he was giving them a tour through Old Jerusalem. (Just days after giving the tour, he was back in the White House to meet with President Trump in support of his Jerusalem decision).

It may not be a coincidence then that Rev Johnnie Moore also happens to own and run a public relations (PR) firm catering especially to leaders who want to promote their public image to "faith-based" audiences. The Bahraini government seems unable to resist Western PR firms.

Enemy of my Enemy...

At first glance, the Bahraini regime's reaching out to Jewish groups may seem like just a part of the broader attempt to appear liberal and tolerant in the eyes of Western governments, businesses and media. Other similar gestures include appointing token female Christian and Jewish ambassadors to London and Washington, or donating 97,000 square feet of land to build the largest Catholic church in the Gulf, or meeting with the director of the Conference of European Rabbis.

While trying to project a liberal image is certainly the main aim of decisions, other actions indicate that Bahrain is warming up to Israel itself as part of a regional alliance against Iran. Rabbis Hier and Cooper recently revealed that King Hamad brought up the issue of the Arab boycott of Israel during their February meeting and said he thinks it should end.

When Donald Trump announced his decision to recognise Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, the most the government of Bahrain could muster was to issue a press release expressing mild annoyance with the move, warning that the move "threatens the peace process in the Middle East". This lukewarm response was in line with the response of other Gulf monarchies in the anti-Iran alliance led by Saudi

Arabia. In contrast, King Hamad sent two of his own sons (including Nasser who has been a central figure in BFEA events) to participate in the Saudi-led military intervention against the threat of Iran-backed rebels in Yemen.

No Tolerance for Social Justice

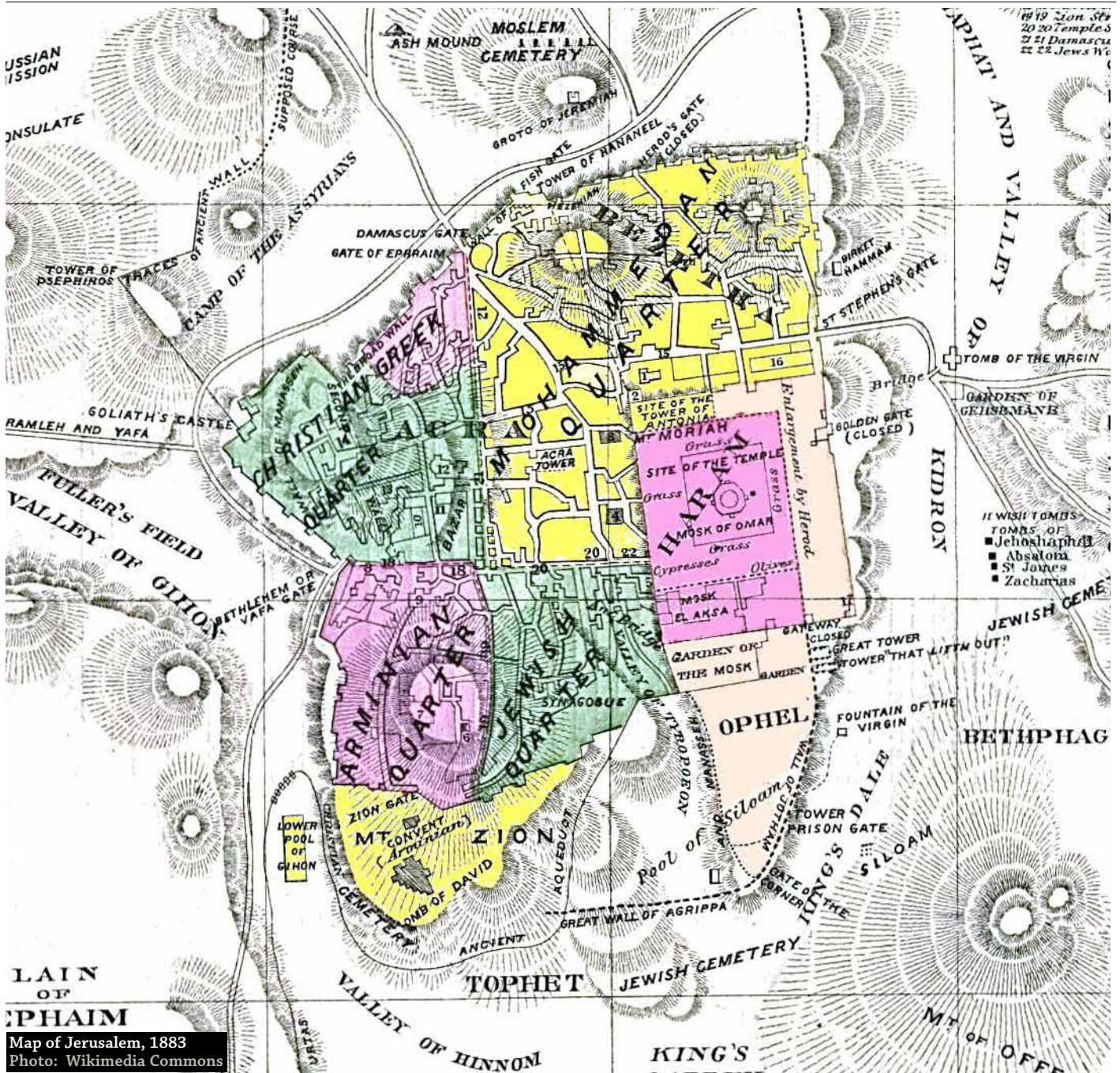
Yet Bahrain and Israel share something more in common, in terms of their systems of rulership, which explains why they and their supporters are so eager to push the narrative of "religious tolerance" that is central to *This is Bahrain* and the Bahrain Declaration on Religious Tolerance.

Both governments rule over populations with vast disparities in economic and political power. In Israel, a Jewish minority rules over the Palestinian population through military occupation, racial discrimination and economic exploitation. In Bahrain, the Al Khalifa monarchy rules over the mass of its population through a carefully constructed system of ethnic discrimination largely inherited from British colonialism, and legitimised by the legacy of the military conquest of the country in 1783.

The Bahrain Declaration lays out King Hamad's vision for religious tolerance amongst individuals, but it is conveniently silent on the role that political oppression and economic inequalities play in stoking religious intolerance — indeed they are the very basis of the conflicts in Bahrain and Israel which are often described as being religious in nature. For the regimes of either country to call for genuine social justice would necessarily result in a drastic loss of privileges for the ruling elite in both.

As Bahraini scholar Abdulhadi Khalaf has documented, the monarchy has struggled to ensure that working-class Bahrainis do not organise across ethno-sectarian lines to claim political and economic power, and those who do face the fiercest brunt of the state. Implicit, therefore, in all of their assertions of religious tolerance and cultural diversity is also a necessary tolerance of political repression and economic exploitation. *This is Bahrain*.

This is an edited version of an article first published by Bahrain Watch in December 2017. Read the full article online at <https://bahrainwatch.org>



Jerusalem: whose capital?

Claims of 3,000 years of Jewish sovereignty over Jerusalem fly in the face of historical and archaeological evidence, argues **Miriam Scharf**

Israeli Prime Minister, Binyamin Netanyahu triumphantly proclaims, “Jerusalem has been the capital of the Jewish people for 3,000 years.” Like so much of the rhetoric that serves to justify the brutal colonisation of Palestine this bears no resemblance to the real history of Jerusalem or of the Jews.

But for millions of Christian Zionists, Bible-belt Trump supporters, it is a truth. The belief that Jews must be “gathered in” to the “Land of Israel” as a forerunner to their mass conversion, the apocalypse and world redemption, should belong in the annals of irrelevant, esoteric sects, not even near the political periphery.

Unfortunately, with Trump’s choice of Mike Pence, an evangelical Christian and former governor of Indiana, for the post of US Vice-President, it is now centre-stage.

The congruity between imperialist policy in the Middle East and the support for “redemptionist” ideas has been influential since the 18th century. The Biblical narrative was used cynically and effectively by Zionists, from Israel’s secular first Prime Minister Ben Gurion to

Netanyahu today.

The facts from archaeology, history, linguistics, anthropology, and even genetic evidence, are ignored as a religious text constructed from myths, takes the place of history in order to justify the colonisation of Palestine.

Highly contested

The length of time Jerusalem was under anything resembling Israelite rule was similar to that of Christians and negligible compared to that of Muslims, or pagans for that matter. Even that degree of settlement is highly contested. Scholars like Shlomo Sand, Norman Finkelstein and others have shown that during the historical periods when Israelite kingdoms are most likely to have existed, settlements were pretty multicultural. Canaanites described those who lived in the land whatever and these were clusters of hillside villages rather than anything resembling a kingdom.

“Jerusalem has been Palestinian longer than London has been English.”

Israeli archaeologists have tried hard, but not come up with evidence confirming the existence of David or Solomon nor found any large enough structures in 10th century BCE Judea and Israel that could match the Biblical descriptions. So people who practised Judaism, whose early form seems more polytheistic than not, did live at some point in this area. But as Moshe Machover says, “claims that the group’s alleged distant ancestors lived in the coveted territory many years ago, or that it was promised to them by a deity in whose existence some of them happen to believe, or that they have long wished to possess it, are simply not good enough,” when it comes to the question of seizing someone else’s land.

Or as Salman Abu Sitta, one of the 750,000 Palestinians violently expelled by Zionists in 1948, put it on hearing Trump’s announcement: “Jerusalem has been Palestinian longer than London has been English.”

The success of the Zionist project of colonising Palestine was only possible with imperialist backing. Before World War Two, Britain hoped working with the Zionists would help safeguard the route to India, while in the post-war era, the US wanted to secure another loyal base in the planet’s largest oil-rich region, not content with their cosy relationship with Saudi Arabia’s ruling family.

Zionist land-grab

The Zionist land-grab and ethnic cleansing which accompanied the creation of the State of Israel led to the division of Jerusalem. Zionist militias had forced hundreds of thousands of Palestinians from their homes even before the final withdrawal of British forces on 14 May 1948.

On 26 July, West Jerusalem was declared part of the

new State of Israel and in 1949 it was proclaimed the capital. The Israeli parliament, the Knesset, moved there and later other government buildings.

Six Day War

In 1967 during the Six Day War, Israel conquered East Jerusalem from Jordan, which had taken control of the West Bank and the eastern part of the city in 1948. Israeli politicians immediately declared Jerusalem as their unified capital city, but this was not accepted internationally. The city had been declared by the UN to have special status under international law.

Since 1948 no foreign embassy has based itself in Jerusalem. The United Nations considers East Jerusalem as occupied territory. It was identified as the supposed future capital of a Palestinian State, an important element of a two-state solution to the conflict. In reality, this formula has proved a handy fiction for international bodies and states who have had no intention of challenging Israel’s continuing colonisation.

Unilateral recognition

Israelis have long held Jerusalem to be their capital. In 1980 a law calling Jerusalem the ‘unified and undivided capital of Israel’ was enacted. This led directly to a UN security council resolution stating that the UN would not recognise this Israeli law. US President Bill Clinton in 1995 broke with this consensus by unilaterally recognising Jerusalem as Israel’s capital. Yet the decision was never enacted, as Clinton himself, and every US President since has signed a waiver every six months citing “security reasons” for not moving the US embassy there.

Meanwhile Jerusalem remains far from being “unified and undivided” as Israeli propaganda claims. Human rights organisation B’tselem, which is based in Israel, catalogues the appalling levels of injustice and violence used to try and remove Palestinians from East Jerusalem.

Discrimination

The Apartheid Wall played a pivotal role in the destruction of this former cultural hub, by cutting up and isolating Palestinian neighbourhoods. Discrimination in terms of access to national and municipal funding and services means that 86 percent of East Jerusalem Palestinians live below the poverty line, severely overcrowded and without basic services, coping with daily violence from the Israeli settler enclaves intentionally built amongst them.

The fate of Jerusalem cannot be separated from the wider issue of justice for Palestine, including ending the occupation and the right of return for Palestinian refugees. In its turn, that raises the question of justice for ordinary people across the Middle East, who are oppressed by regimes which collude in Israel’s occupation of Palestine.

Miriam Scharf is international officer for Newham Teachers Association

The end of the two-state solution?

The Oslo 'peace process' which gave birth to the Palestinian Authority has led the Palestinian movement into a dead-end, argues **Richard Donnelly**

Since its creation by the 1993 Oslo Peace Accords signed by Yasser Arafat and then Israeli Prime Minister, Yitzhak Rabin, the Palestinian Authority (PA) has based its claims to legitimacy on its ability to negotiate with Israel and eventually establish an independent, internationally recognised Palestinian state.

But this 'peace process' route to an independent Palestine has been consistently undermined by the aggressive Israeli settler movement in the West Bank. Ever since Oslo, the number of settlements in the West Bank – which are illegal in international law – have increased massively. Since only 2009, there has been an growth of 90,000 in the settler population.

Direct rule

Some 60 percent of the West Bank continues to be under the direct rule of the Israeli military. In this 'Area C', there are now some 400,000 Israeli settlers and just 70,000 Palestinians. The Israeli army carries out constant harassment of the Palestinian communities there, demolishing homes, facilitating the theft of agricultural land by settlers and setting up checkpoints

to isolate Arab villages or towns from one another.

This aggressive colonial project forms the background to the case of 17-year old Ahed Tamimi, which recently shot to the attention of the international Palestine solidarity movement. Ahed was arrested for slapping an Israeli soldier after her 14-year old cousin had been shot in the face during a demonstration in their home village of Nabi Saleh.

Leading force

The Tamimi family has been a leading force in years of protests against the attempts of the Israelis in the nearby settlement of Halamish to steal land from the residents of Nabi Saleh, burn their produce and harass the villagers.

With the huge expansion of this settlements movement has come an increase in the power of the most right-wing political tendencies in Israeli society. In December 2017, the Central Committee of Binyamin Netanyahu's Likud party passed a high-profile resolution calling for the annexation of 'Area C' – which the Israeli state refers to by its supposed biblical name of 'Judea and Samaria'. The annexation of



Ahed Tamimi
Photo: Wikimedia Commons

'Area C' would make a future Palestinian state in the West Bank impossible.

Trump's recognition of Jerusalem as the Israeli capital has given Netanyahu and his backers in the settlements the signal to step up their aggressive policies towards West Bank Palestinians. Jerusalem is a highly contested area, with Israeli settlements expanding rapidly while the government uses pretexts, such as large-scale archaeological digs to uncover the biblical 'City of David', to force out Palestinians and demolish their homes.

Unpopularity

All this massively undermines the Palestinian Authority's governing party, Fatah, and its ageing leader, Mahmoud Abbas. His 13-year rule has been predicated on his ability to deliver a two-state solution which now looks more and more distant. The failure of Fatah's strategy for an independent Palestine, and their neoliberal reforms to the economy of the West Bank, have fed Abbas's huge unpopularity, with two thirds of Palestinians now believing that he should resign and that the two-state solution is dead.

Against the backdrop of this crisis of

legitimacy for the Palestinian Authority, Abbas has used the cover of his hated 'security coordination' with the Israeli military to clampdown on his political enemies, with PA security services sometimes clashing with Fatah's own militias.

Hunger strike

But political forces outside of Abbas's ruling clique have still been able to lead resistance to the occupation in the West Bank. The huge hunger strike of hundreds of Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails last year is an important example. The strike not only won some of its demands, but it re-energised parts of the resistance in the West Bank, with activists organising solidarity with the prisoners in Palestinian towns and cities.

The leader of the strike was Marwan Barghouti, the imprisoned leader of one of Fatah's militias, who is extraordinarily popular in Palestinian society. He was a leader of the Second Intifada in the early 2000s and a subsequent critic of the Palestinian Authority.

Another focus for resistance in the West Bank has been the attempts of

the Israeli authorities to limit access to the al-Aqsa mosque complex in Jerusalem. In July 2017, the Israelis tried to impose new restrictions on Palestinians entering al-Aqsa, but their moves were beaten back by mass protests. These demonstrations were originally called by forces independent of the PA leadership. Moreover, armed cells aligned with Palestinian resistance organisations such as Hamas, Islamic Jihad and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine continue to be suspected by the Israelis of carrying out attacks on settlements.

The distance between the Abbas's strategy of never-ending negotiation and that of those directly confronting the Israeli state points to the huge political crisis faced by the Palestinian Authority. The Trump era is seen by the rampant Israeli right-wing as their chance to make significant strides towards annexation of the West Bank and the final defeat of the Palestinian national movement. Faced with these threats, the movement of Palestinians confronting the Israeli state will need to rejuvenate itself, in recognition of the total failure of the 'peace process' with Israel.



Protest for Ibrahim, Dublin
Photo: Memet Uludag

Anti-racist unity helped bring Ibrahim home

Irish campaigners defied the brutality of Egypt's military regime and indifference from their own government in battle to free school student, writes **Memet Uludag** of United Against Racism.



Irish MP Brid Smith joined the campaign
Photo: Memet Uludag

The case of Ibrahim Halawa, a 21-year-old Irishman, who spent more than four years in prison in Egypt after he was arrested on a family holiday exposes the brutality of the Egyptian state and the indifference of the Irish government to the fate of one of its citizens.

But it is also a victory for a 4-year long united front campaign that confronted racism, eventually forced the Irish Government to act and the Egyptian regime to release him.

Since his release, Ibrahim has spoken numerous times about his ordeal in the prisons of al-Sisi's Egypt. As he has repeatedly said, "he was one of many political prisoners who were arrested and tortured by al-Sisi's brutal regime".

While on holiday in Egypt in August 2013, Ibrahim had attended an anti-

government rally and spoke at it defending democracy and human rights against the ongoing political crackdown.

He was arrested after the rally and kept in prison for four years without a trial. He said, "As a 17 year old young man I simply could not ignore the arrests and killings of my friends". As he put it, when speaking at United Against Racism event, "democracy is not just needed in Ireland or Europe, but also in Egypt".

His trials were postponed more than 20 times, adding mental torture to the horrible physical conditions of his prison. After his release Ibrahim continues to campaign for the political prisoners not only in Egypt but also in Palestine and elsewhere. He also speaks out against racism and takes part in homeless solidarity campaigns.

Following his arrest, Ibrahim's family started a campaign for his release. Over the four years of campaigning they organised numerous public rallies and other events.

Supported by Amnesty International, United Against Racism, socialists and other progressive TDs (MPs), the family appealed to the Irish government to act and secure his release. For the first couple of years the government didn't

go beyond the occasional statements from the ministers.

But growing public pressure and media coverage forced them eventually to act. It was an example of public pressure and a growing united front campaign that eventually secured his release. Ibrahim's sisters, Fatima and Somaia, along with other family members and friends were at the forefront of the struggle for his release.

As the united-front campaign grew and became more visible, so did the vicious racist reaction. Mainly on social media, but also in some of the mainstream press, racist and Islamophobic attacks on Ibrahim and the campaign began to grow.

Ibrahim was labelled a terrorist and a member of, what the racists called, "terrorist organisation", the Muslim Brotherhood. Born and raised in Dublin, he was denounced as "not being a real Irish citizen" because his parents were originally from Egypt.

Islamophobes targeted Ibrahim and his family for being Muslim. Finally, self-certified racist "criminologists", including a former Fine Gael government minister, tried to prove what the Egyptian courts couldn't: Ibrahim must have done something wrong, therefore he must have been guilty. There was a deep and widespread racism against Ibrahim and the #FreeIbrahim campaign.

Islamophobic propaganda dating back to the "war on terror" days was repeated all over again. Another form of racism came as the "we must look after our own first" argument. Those voicing this said, "Ibrahim is not 'one of us', not Irish, therefore the Irish Government should not spend any time and resources for him while there are so many Irish people in need". This is a very widespread sentiment in Ireland. This can be seen in many sections of the society as a response to the ongoing housing crisis and cuts.

There are no organised far right or fascist movements in Ireland but there are certainly increased attempts to spread such ideas and mobilise. Ibrahim's case is not the only one where racism and Islamophobia have reared their ugly heads. There is also a strong anti-racist campaign mobilising and confronting such forces at every step they take.

And despite all the challenges, Ibrahim's home-coming showed that campaigns for justice can win, despite the odds.



Shawkan has been jailed since 2013
Photo: FreedomforShawkan

One of the world's biggest prisons for journalists

At least 32 journalists are imprisoned in Egypt on charges related to their work, according to *Reporters without Borders*. Little surprise that the Paris-based organisation placed Egypt near the bottom of its 2017 World Press Freedom Index, and described the country as "one of the world's biggest prisons for journalists."

The long-running campaign for jailed photojournalist Shawkan (above), received a boost in May with international recognition of his plight by UNESCO, which awarded him its Press Freedom prize for 2018, recognising his "courage, resistance and commitment to freedom of expression".

In a letter smuggled out of prison, Shawkan spoke of his "joy and sadness" at receiving the prize, adding:

How does a state or a quasi-state — as the president claims — demand that the law be respected, while being the first to violate it?

The outcome of Shawkan's trial was still unknown as *Middle East Solidarity* went to press: he has been held in pre-trial detention since August 2013, when he was arrested while covering

a massacre of opposition protesters at Raba'a Square by the Egyptian military.

"How does a state demand that the law be respected, while being the first to violate it?"

The outcome of Shawkan's trial was still unknown as *Middle East Solidarity* went to press: he has been held in pre-trial detention since August 2013, when he was arrested while covering a massacre of opposition protesters at Raba'a Square by the Egyptian military. He is part of a mass trial of 739 defendants and faces a string of charges including murder and attempted murder.

Farcial mass trials have been a regular feature of the Egyptian court system since 2013, with defendants unable to present evidence and in many cases condemned to death or long prison terms on the basis of flimsy evidence.

Go to www.facebook.com/FreedomforShawkan



Protests demand justice for Egypt's disappeared

Egypt Solidarity

Friends and colleagues of murdered Cambridge PhD student Giulio Regeni gathered to protest at the Egyptian embassy with campaigners from Amnesty International and the UCU union on 2 February, marking the second anniversary of the discovery of his body.

UCU President Joanna de Groot spoke on behalf of the UCU union, which has supported the campaign for Truth for Giulio and Justice for Egypt's Disappeared for two years. She was joined by Giulio's friends Paz Zarate and Laurie Blair and campaigners from Amnesty. Sue Woodsford from Cambridge City Amnesty group said:

"We have organised and taken part in actions for two years to highlight Amnesty's campaign to find out the



UCU President Joanna de Groot addressed the protest | Photo: Amnesty International

truth about what happened to Giulio and all the other people "disappeared" in Egypt. And we have had support from across the city from both town and gown – the leader of Cambridge City Council, our Mayor, our MP Daniel Zeichner and our MEP Alex Mayer have all shown their support."

The 2 February protest followed an international day of action on 24 January organised by lawyers in solidarity with their colleagues in Egypt who are facing arrest and persecution for their work defending

victims of human rights abuses, including victims of enforced disappearances. The Day of the Endangered Lawyer saw lawyers wearing court robes gather to protest at Egyptian embassies and consulates in Amsterdam, Barcelona, Berlin, Bordeaux, Geneva, The Hague, Madrid, New York, Paris, Rome, Toronto.

[Read Laurie Blair's moving speech at the Truth for Giulio protest on the back page](#)

Mahienour and Moatasem acquitted after campaign

Egypt Solidarity

Lawyer Mahienour el-Massry and trade unionist Moatasem Medhat were acquitted on appeal by a court in Alexandria, the FreeMahienour Facebook page reported on 13 January. The two had been convicted of breaking Egypt's repressive anti-protest law, and breaching a law on public assembly imposed by the British colonial authorities in 1914, and sentenced to two years in jail. Three of their co-defendants in the same case did not attend court and so were tried in absentia, but can still appeal the judgement against them.

The case against Mahienour and Moatasem sparked an international protest campaign, with solidarity actions taking place in London, Leeds, Paris, Dublin and other cities



UCU NEC member Lesley McGorrigan backed the campaign | Photo: Egypt Solidarity

The charges against Mahienour and Moatasem and their colleagues related to a demonstration during the wave of protests against the transfer of the Tiran and Sanafir Islands from Egypt to Saudi Arabia, but it is clear that the real goal is to lock up campaigners who put themselves at risk to defend workers and activists persecuted by the authorities.

Mahienour, an award-winning human rights lawyer, is well-known

for her work defending activists, trade unionists and Syrian refugees from persecution by the authorities.

She was jailed in 2015 in a case connected with protests over the acquittal of policemen charged with the murder of Khaled Said, the young Alexandrian man whose death in 2010 sparked the protest movement which paved the way for the 2011 uprising. While in prison she was awarded the Ludovic Trarieux International Human Rights Prize for her work defending so many people ground down by Egypt's oppressive judicial system.

Trade unionist Moatasem Medhat is one of the founders of the independent trade union at the Lord Company shaving equipment factory, serving as secretary to the union before being victimised and sacked for his trade union activism. He is also a key figure in the Permanent Conference of Alexandrian Workers, a regional federation of independent unions, and has served on the federation's executive since 2014.

[Read more about what you can do in solidarity with political prisoners in Egypt on p22](#)

Standing up for LGBT+ people in Egypt

Korean activists

LGBT+ communities, progressive parties, labour organisations and student societies in South Korea demonstrated against the Egyptian government's repression toward LGBT+ outside the Egyptian embassy in South Korea on 17 October in response to the call from NGOs in Egypt for solidarity.



Protest outside the Egyptian embassy in Seoul | Photo: All Together

Saudi Prince's UK visit highlights war crimes in Yemen

Alisdare Hickson

After over one thousand days into the Saudi bombing of Yemen, which is almost entirely UK/US equipped and supported, the first large protest took place in London on 7 March, as a few hundred people demonstrated outside Downing Street during the visit of Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman.

They were outraged that the British government was not just rolling out the red carpet for one of the most brutal family dictatorships in the Middle East, but also quite deliberately facilitating and aiding the Saudi terror bombing of civilian targets in Yemen, including numerous schools and hospitals, in the full knowledge that this will only exacerbate the world's worst humanitarian crisis.

Since the war in Yemen started the UK has exported over £4.6 billion worth of arms, including Typhoon and Tornado aircraft as well as weaponry and Paveway IV bombs which have been used with appalling consequences in Yemen. We have even been training the Saudi air force.

The same day as the protest against the welcoming of Mohammad bin Salman at Downing Street, the British corporate owned mainstream media embarked on a massive campaign to



Demonstrators gathered at Downing Street | Photo: Alisdare Hickson

whitewash the crown prince who has become Saudi Arabia's feared absolute ruler and whose corrupt regime has a cosy relationship with many of Britain's biggest businesses.

The deaths of tens of thousands in Yemen was, several newspapers claimed, of little or no importance in comparison to the prince's reforming zeal. The decision to allow women to drive and the reintroduction of cinemas was highlighted as the evidence that this was a regime Britain could and should support economically and diplomatically. That the Saudi government has just launched a brutal purge of political opponents and the country's Shi'a minority was not considered important or relevant.

Surveys conducted by the Yemen Data Project, a group of academics, human rights and national security experts, showed that as of 2016 at least one third of all Saudi air strikes had hit civilian targets with the United

Nations estimating in 2017 that 5,000 civilians had been killed by the Saudi bombing. The predictable indirect consequences of the bombing however have been even more catastrophic.

Britain continues to be complicit in one of the worst war crimes of the twenty first century by supplying the aircraft and weapons and the diplomatic support for Saudi Arabia's three year bombing campaign. This together with a tight blockade on basic imports of food, fuel and other essentials has created the world's worst humanitarian crisis with 76% of the population in need of humanitarian aid and 8.4 million at risk of famine, according to the United Nations World Food Programme. Additionally, over one million Yemenis have now contracted cholera while a recent outbreak of diphtheria is spreading rapidly.

Alisdare Hickson is a photographer - you can see more of his work on Flickr



Stand up for victimised Bahraini activist

By David Binns (UCU London Retired Members branch)

Sayed Ahmed Alwadaei is a well-known and respected Bahraini activist who participated in the 2011 mass movement in that country. Now based in London, Sayed serves as Director of Advocacy for the campaigning group Bahrain Institute for Rights and Democracy (BIRD), a key focus for information on Bahraini developments including opposition to the regime.

Not content with having driven Sayed into exile, operatives of the Bahraini royal dictatorship have turned their hand to victimising members of his family in Bahrain. Sayed has written movingly in the *Guardian* of the targeting of his family.

On 6th November 2017 an Early Day Motion (EDM 509) was tabled by Labour MP and Foreign Affairs Committee member Anne Clwyd. In the nature of such interventions, the EDM appeals to both the Bahraini and British governments: that is to key players in the Bahraini repression. Nonetheless, it rightly condemns specific forms of social injustice prevalent in Bahrain. These include “illegal restrictions on the activities of civil society and of peaceful opposition” and “politically motivated prosecutions”.

The motion deserves the widest

possible support. It offers one means to help raise awareness of both Bahraini repression generally and the centrality of the British state, which in late 2016 opened a military base in Bahrain. To this day Bahrain’s state gangs are armed to the teeth by the British imperial state and its business associates.

The left in Britain has a key responsibility to oppose these reactionary relationships. Support for EDM 509 is a contribution to that struggle.

What you can do:

- Contact your MP and ask them to sign EDM 509
- Go to the Bahrain Institute for Rights and Democracy (BIRD) website www.birdbh.org for more information



Trump and Netanyahu: partners in crime | Photo: Israeli MFA

Mobilise against Trump’s visit

Donald Trump is set to visit the UK on 13 July. There are plenty of reasons to oppose him in the streets, whether it is his decision to relocate the US embassy to Jerusalem, his cosying up to Israel’s Netanyahu, Saudi crown prince Mohammed Bin Salman or Egyptian military dictator Abdelfattah al-Sisi.

Together Against Trump has called for a united demonstration on 13 July. This will bring together anti-racist and anti-war organisations with trade unionists and activists.

As Together Against Trump puts it: “this could be a march of millions. 4% of the population - or around 2 million people have said that they would “definitely” take part in protests against the visit.

This demonstration isn’t just about Trump. The treatment of the Windrush generation has highlighted the British elite’s disgraceful record of racism and bigotry. This is a fight against our own “hostile environment” as well as the American government.”

What you can do:

- Go to the Together Against Trump Facebook event for updates
- Pass a resolution supporting the demonstrations in your trade union branch



Egypt Solidarity

Egypt Solidarity works to highlight attacks on social and democratic rights by the repressive military government in Egypt. We organise campaigns for political prisoners, publicise attacks by the state on trade unionists, journalists and human rights activists.

We call on our governments to suspend all financial, military or other support to the Egyptian authorities that may be used to violate the rights of Egyptian citizens. In particular we demand immediate cessation of all sales and transfers to the Egyptian government of weapons, ammunition, vehicles, cyber-surveillance technology and other materials for use against those who exercise their right to protest.

What you can do:

- Go to www.egyptsolidarityinitiative.org for updates.



Disabled activists join a protest in Tunisia in 2011 | Photo: Nasser Nouri

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Strike



MENA Solidarity

menasolidaritynetwork.com

MENA Solidarity is a network of activists from different unions in the UK engaged in building solidarity for struggle to win social justice and workers' rights in the Middle East. We are supported by the UCU, PCS and NUT unions and a number of other trade union regions and branches.

Bahrain Watch

bahrainwatch.org

Bahrain Watch is an independent research and advocacy organisation formed in February 2012 that seeks to promote effective, transparent and accountable governance in Bahrain.



Egypt Solidarity

egyptsolidarityinitiative.org

Egypt Solidarity launched on 11 February 2014, the third anniversary of the fall of Mubarak, in order to campaign in defence of democratic rights in Egypt.

‘WE WILL HAVE JUSTICE FOR GIULIO’



At a protest marking two years since his disappearance and murder in Cairo, Giulio Regeni’s friend **Laurie Blair** read out this statement.

I was tempted today to run through the facts of what happened to our friend Giulio Regeni in detail, and I speak for myself, as a friend. The fact that he was working in Egypt as a legitimate academic researcher. The fact that he disappeared over two years ago in January 2016. The fact that he was found dead two years ago tomorrow by a Cairo roadside, his body broken and battered, missing fingernails and covered in cigarette burns.

The fact that his disappearance came in an ongoing context where thousands of Egyptians have been kidnapped, imprisoned, and murdered by the Sisi regime – as verified by all important human rights organisations.

The fact that the Egyptian authorities have consistently tried to obstruct any real investigation – including by murdering a gang of petty thieves and planting evidence on them.

The fact that senior Egyptian officials have admitted to reporters and investigators that a crime of this magnitude must have had the foreknowledge, and the complicity, of the highest levels – even the dictator Sisi himself. The fact that the Sisi regime is ultimately responsible for creating a climate where its security forces murder on orders and at will.

But we all know these facts and these details. They are readily available in print and online. They and even more facts and details doubtless exist on tape, on file, and in the testimony of dozens of regime officials. The only people who choose to ignore them are the Sisi regime – and those in the West who would prefer that we forgot about our friend, Giulio Regeni, and fall silent.

So here is some news for Mr Sisi, his regime, their collaborators in the Embassy here, and the cowards in Western governments who have decided to put business and politics ahead of truth and justice.

We, the friends of Giulio Regeni, will not forget about him. We will not be silent. We will resist any cynical attempt to divide us, because we know who our enemy is. We will stand firm and support each other, knowing that we cannot bring Giulio back to his family, but we can try to prevent the same horror from happening to others.

We will not rest until you, who are ultimately responsible for our friend’s murder, are made to pay for your crimes. We will not rest until the military regime terrorising the Egyptian people, ruining and destabilising the country, is brought down and put behind bars. Whether it takes years, decades, or a lifetime, we will have justice for Giulio and we will have justice for Egypt.

[Go to page 20 to read more on the campaign](#)

