

## Execution of Activists Sign of Bahraini Regime's Crackdown on Free Speech: Int'l Lawyer

January, 15, 2017 - 15:00

**TEHRAN (Tasnim) – A senior Canadian human rights attorney denounced the “torture” and “unfair trial” of three young activists executed by the Bahraini regime earlier today, saying the move is indicative of the kingdom’s severe crackdown on free speech.**



“It is clear that the trials of these individuals were unfair and failed to meet the required international standards for a fair trial,” Edward Corrigan from Ontario said in an exclusive interview with the Tasnim News Agency on Sunday.

“The rush to execute the three men it is an indication of a more severe crackdown on political dissent and free speech in Bahrain,” he added.

Following is the full text of the interview:

**Tasnim:** The Bahraini regime, in yet another attempt to silence the voices of dissent, executed three young protesters today on political grounds. Earlier on Saturday, the people of the Persian Gulf country poured into streets in two towns to denounce the court ruling that upheld death sentences against the three anti-regime demonstrators. In a statement, the Bahraini Shiite clerics had earlier called on the people to take part in Saturday’s “demonstration of rage” in a bid to save the lives of innocent youths facing death in the unfair trial. On December 12, 2016 Bahrain’s appeals court also upheld a nine-year prison term imposed on Sheikh Ali Salman, the secretary general of main opposition party in the Arab country, al-Wefaq National Islamic Society, despite widespread criticism both at home and abroad against his imprisonment. The Manama regime also announced on June 20, 2016 that it had revoked the citizenship of Sheikh Isa Qassim, the spiritual leader of Bahrain's Shiite majority. The regime later said it would put the prominent cleric on trial on trumped-up charges. Sheikh Qassim’s planned trials were adjourned after the prominent cleric did not appear in court. In the meantime, a sit-in that supporters of Sheikh Qassim have staged in front of his house in Diraz to protect him against the regime forces has remained in place for months. It seems that the Al Khalifa regime is not going to modify its approach to the opposition. What do you think about the developments?

**Corrigan:** Three of the men who were convicted of involvement in the killing of three security officers, including one from the Emirates have just now been executed. According to Amnesty

International, the trials were unfair and that torture was reportedly used against the accused. On January 9, the Court of Cassation in Bahrain upheld the death sentences against three Bahraini men. It also upheld life sentences against seven others and the revocation of the nationality of eight of them. All ten men were convicted following an unfair trial in relation to the March 2014 killing of three policemen. Amnesty International reported that according to the statement made by some of the men, during three weeks of interrogation at the Criminal Investigation Directorate (CID), the 10 men had no access to their families or lawyers, and were tortured. Sami Mshaima' and Abbas al-Samea later told their families that they were given electric shocks, beaten, burnt with cigarettes, deprived of sleep, and sexually assaulted.

It is clear that the trials of these individuals were unfair and failed to meet the required international standards for a fair trial. The rush to execute the three men is an indication of a more severe crackdown on political dissent and free speech in Bahrain. There has been criticism of the terrible human rights record in Bahrain by human rights groups and the United Nations. However, the main stream press in the West is largely silent on these abuses with a few notable exceptions like the Guardian in Great Britain. The position of the governments of United States and Great Britain has been silent but the Opposition Labour Party in Britain has voiced its opposition to the business as usual approach of the British government and even financial support for the absolute monarchy in Bahrain.

**Tasnim: Last month, British Prime Minister Theresa May paid a trip to some Arab countries of the Persian Gulf region, including Bahrain, to expand ties with them, ignoring international calls to scrap the trip due to widespread violations of human rights by the Arab monarchies. Before departing London for a two-day visit to Bahrain, May said she was headed there to lay the foundations for “a new chapter” in ties with the country. In your opinion, what objectives is Britain pursuing in its relations with the tiny Persian Gulf country?**

**Corrigan:** There has been funding from the British government in the amount of two million pounds. This money is reportedly to help Bahrain to improve its justice system and to improve human rights in the tiny Persian Gulf monarchy. Critics have pointed out that the justice system in Bahrain is getting much worse with torture being used against prisoners and the violent suppression of peaceful demonstrators, the killing of unarmed demonstrators and the revocation of citizenship from more than 200 Bahrainis. Freedom of speech and political rights are under severe attack in Bahrain. There have been calls in Britain to stop sending money to Bahrain until it substantially improves its human rights record.

**Tasnim: The Arab Kingdom, which is home to the US Navy's massive 5th Fleet, has been witnessing peaceful protests against the ruling Al Khalifa regime on a daily basis since early 2011. This is while, scores of Bahrainis have been killed and hundreds of others injured and arrested in the ongoing crackdown on the peaceful demonstrations. How do you see the human rights situation in the tiny Persian Gulf country?**

**Corrigan:** For the foreseeable future the human rights situation is very bleak. The Arab monarchies in the (Persian) Gulf are standing together and savagely repressing all signs of political opposition to the Arab absolutist monarchical regimes. However, over the long run the current political situation is not sustainable. If the monarchies do not bring about meaningful political reform and embrace democracy eventually there will be an explosion that will shake the foundations of the entire region. For the time being it appears that the United States and Great Britain are not going to take any meaningful action against the Bahraini regime despite its terrible record on human rights. For the time being they are prepared to put money and short term political interests above human rights. However, in my opinion this only delays the political changes that inevitably will come.

**Tasnim: It has been five years since troops from Saudi Arabia were deployed to Bahrain to assist in the Manama regime's crackdown on the peaceful protesters. What is the reason behind such assistance? In your opinion, what geopolitical goals is Riyadh pursuing by the military intervention in the tiny Persian Gulf country?**

Corrigan: The Saudis and their allies in the other dictatorships in the Persian Gulf region are afraid of losing political control and are afraid of any movement towards political reform. They have money but little legitimacy and they know it. If Bahrainis removed the absolutist monarchy in Bahrain it sets an example that threatens the other absolutist monarchies and authoritarian regimes in the Arabian Peninsula. From their perspective they must stand together or face oblivion.

R1355/P42329/S1194/CT20