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Bahrain: Sana'a Committee seeking the Release of Prisoners in Guantánamo Bay, Manama Meeting, 31 July 2004

The Bahrain Centre for Human Rights (BCHR) hosted a meeting of various Sana'a Committee members for the week of 26 -31 July, 2004 in Manama, Bahrain.

The Committee members met with various representatives of the Bahrain government on four occasions during the week, seeking government intervention on behalf of the Bahraini prisoners held in Guantánamo Bay:

The Committee asked that the Bahraini Government secure and vouch for respected Bahraini lawyers who may travel with U.S. lawyers to visit the Bahraini prisoners in Guantánamo Bay within the next three weeks.

The Committee asked that the Bahraini Government consult with the major New York law firm of Dorsey & Whitney (who are representing the Bahraini prisoners without cost) either at the Embassy in Washington or by invitation to Bahrain, to determine jointly the most effective strategy to ensure that the prisoners receive the basic protections of due process.

The Committee asked that the Bahraini Government consult urgently with the Administration of President George W. Bush with a view to seeking the immediate repatriation of the Bahraini prisoners, and the fair treatment of all prisoners in Guantánamo Bay.

The Committee expresses its gratitude to the Government for the respectful and constructive manner in which the Government received these requests.

The Committee members, ably assisted by the excellent and industrious volunteers of the BHRC, met with the families of the six known Bahraini prisoners: Salah AbdulRasool Ali Al-Balushi, Juma Mohammed Al Dossary, Salan bin Ebrahim Al Khalifa, Isa Ali Al-Murbati, Abdulla Al Noaimi, and Adel Kamel Abdulla Abdulla.

The Committee members also talked with families from Jordan, Libya, Saudi Arabia, Syria and Yemen, sought to allay their fears for their loved ones, and secured their permission to bring law suits before US courts on behalf of a total of more than 30 prisoners.

Relatives of the detainees who came to seek legal assistance included mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, and children. Some of them arrived by car journeys of over 12 hours. Some broke down in tears as they provided details about their loved ones to the Committee. As the 14 year old son of one detainee wrote in a statement that will be filed in court on behalf of his father:

"I have written another letter to my father where I have said: 'Dad, I miss you, I dream about you . . . when you come back to me I will be able to play with you, laugh with you, eat with you, and walk with you. When I wake up, I cannot find you at home. How long are you going to stay there? We want you. Dad, I love you with all my heart. Your son.'"

"The disregard for the rule of law has caused terrible severe suffering to relatives. The descriptions of their suffering left me terribly sad at what has been done to them," said Clive Stafford Smith, the lawyer from the US charity Justice in Exile.

As should be true of any prisoner held anywhere in the world, the Committee reaffirms the principle that the Guantánamo Prisoners cannot continue to be held without a lawyer, without notice of the charges against them, and without a fair trial that meets the minimum requirements of international law. Failing this, they must immediately be released.

The Committee announces its intention to continue the work for the restoration of the rule of law for prisoners held in this "war on terror". In particular, the Committee plans to explore the possibility of visits to other countries in the Middle East and Asia to establish contact with relatives of the detainees, to provide them with legal assistance free of charge, and to provide them with hope.

The Committee thanks the BCHR for all of its work, and notes for the benefit of all families of the victims of Guantánamo Bay that they may contact the BCHR (at + 973 17729500) in order to receive information on how to secure free legal assistance for their loved ones.