BAHRAIN SOLIDARITY CAMPAIGN

Press Release – Monday, June 20th 2011

**MANCHESTER CONFERENCE CALLS ON UK GOVERNMENT TO DEMAND A HALT TO HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES IN BAHRAIN**

A former adviser to the Al Khalifa regime told a Manchester conference at the weekend that the proportion of people killed in Bahrain during the anti government protests would be the equivalent of four and a half thousand people if it was replicated in the UK.

Dr Salah Al Bander illustrated the enormity of the Bahraini government's human rights abuses using comparisons with the UK. Doctors who have been killed or disappeared would be tantamount to taking 4,800 medical staff out of the National Health Service, he said, and the number of journalists targeted by the regime is the same as the entire editorial personnel at the BBC.

Dr Al Bander, who was deported from Bahrain in 2006 following his worldwide exposure of a government conspiracy to rig elections, also told the “Bahrain and the Arab Spring” conference at Manchester Metropolitan University that the number of students banned by the regime is the equivalent of 240,000 students in the UK.

Bahraini students in Manchester had funding withdrawn and their families were targeted after they took part in a demonstration supporting protesters in Bahrain. MMU student leaders have been campaigning on the students' behalf and instigated a “rapid response” strategy to put pressure on universities and enable the students to continue their education. Some scholarships have now been restored but those students have been forced to sign a pledge of allegiance to the King of Bahrain.

The conference was organised by the Manchester based Bahrain Solidarity Campaign which is working closely with Justice for Bahrain. Both organisations are demanding that the British Government calls for the release of all political prisoners in Bahrain and closure of the military courts introduced under the special powers legislation - and supposedly lifted at the beginning of June.

Barrister Pete Weatherby, who has produced two detailed reports after going to Bahrain on behalf of the UK Bar Human Rights Committee, spoke about his experiences of meeting detainees and their families. He also told the conference about the Bahraini human rights lawyer who has now been detained incommunicado and is accused of inciting hatred towards the regime. The lawyer is due to appear before the military court again today (Monday).

Dr Al Bander argued that some form of outside assistance from the United Nations and the Arab League could help bring an end to the conflict. But Dr Dalia Said Mostafa, of the University of Manchester, who has campaigned on behalf of women in Bahrain, said the people wanted to overthrow the regime, not negotiate with it.

Bahrain is an international financial centre and banks are extremely concerned about the continuing unrest in the country. Pete Weatherby said if banks started to withdraw from Bahrain it would help persuade the regime to halt its persecution of the people.

The conference agreed that campaigners should put pressure on companies operating in Bahrain. Campaigners will also call for the withdrawal of Saudi Arabian troops from the country. Justice for Bahrain spokesperson Mohamed Sadiq said the campaign should continue and be escalated as action taken in Britain had already made some difference. He cited the case of the young poet Ayat al-Quarmezi whose case had been highlighted by Justice for Bahrain and had since had her prison sentence reduced.

MMU student leaders said they planned to extend their solidarity action to students in Bahrain itself as well as continuing to support those in the UK. It was also agreed that trade unionists in the UK can play a big role in highlighting the victimisation of union members in Bahrain.

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