



[Bahraini Human Rights Activists Condemn the Government's Decision to Normalize Ties with Israel](#)

In the aftermath of Bahrain's announcement that it would be normalizing relations with Israel, the regime's decision was condemned by human rights activists and civil society groups within the country. Citizens took to social media to denounce the move, with the top hashtag trending on Twitter accounts there quickly becoming "Bahrainis against normalization." Like the criticism towards the previously announced UAE-Israel normalization agreement, opposition from activists in Bahrain stems from the absence of fair concessions towards the Palestinians in conjunction with any potential deal, as laid out in the longstanding regional policy behind the Arab Peace Initiative. The response from many Bahrainis to the normalization announcement demonstrates that despite the recent actions of some repressive regimes in the Middle East, commitment to a just resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict remains a popular sentiment among the general populations in the region.

Following the United Arab Emirates in mid-August, news of the Bahraini decision late last week meant that the country has now become the second Gulf nation to establish open ties with Israel in the past month. U.S. President Trump had already announced plans to host an official signing ceremony in the White House this week with UAE and Israeli officials, and Bahraini officials also took part in the event. The Trump administration has been criticized for politicizing the Middle East peace process during an election year and making blatant efforts to coax Arab nations into normalizing relations with Israel, as was demonstrated by Secretary of State Pompeo's controversial recent trip across the region. In the lead up to the November presidential election, Trump seems eager to tout the normalization agreements as a foreign policy success, however they fail to incorporate elements that are widely-agreed upon as essential to the peace process such as Israeli withdrawal from occupied Palestinian territories.

Due to these shortcomings in the deals, activists and groups in Bahrain had previously spoken out against the UAE's decision to normalize relations with Israel. Last month, eight political parties in Bahrain signed a statement demanding that the government condemn the UAE-Israel agreement and a collection of 25 civil society organizations also expressed opposition to it. Some of these organizations, like the Bahraini Democratic Youth Society, voiced similar dissatisfaction to Bahrain's deal as well. The public outcry against normalization has certainly been more evident in Bahrain than it was in the United Arab Emirates. Whereas in the UAE there are few independent civil society organizations and political groups to express dissent, Bahrain on the other hand has a history of political mobilization. In the latter country, while they are often subject to repression at the hands of the regime, human rights groups and opposition political parties have also been given limited freedom to voice a certain extent of dissent. Therefore, it is not surprising that condemnation of the decision to normalize has been more pronounced in Bahrain than it was in the UAE.

Ultimately, peace activists fear that the recent moves by the UAE and Bahrain will only solidify Israeli occupation and weaken the longstanding regional position that calls for normalization with Israel when fair and meaningful concessions are made to the Palestinians. Until those conditions are met, injustice will continue to prevail.