

Senior Bahraini official sacked for refusing to shake hands with Israeli ambassador



Former President of the Bahrain Authority for Culture and Antiquities, Shaikha Mai bint Mohammed Al Khalifah (Photo via Twitter)

Manama, July 26 (RHC)-- A top Bahraini official and member of the ruling family has been dismissed from her position after she refused to shake hands with the Israeli ambassador to the Persian Gulf country.

Shaikha Mai bint Mohammed Al Khalifah, president of the Bahrain Authority for Culture and Antiquities, was sacked by order of Bahrain's King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifah, according to Lebanon's Arabic-language al-Mayadeen television news network.

The controversy arose last month, when U.S. Ambassador to Bahrain Steven C. Bondy held a memorial service at his home for his father, to which Sheikha Mai was invited. When greeting the guests at the ceremony, the Bahraini royal family member reportedly withdrew her hand and refused to shake the hand of Eitan Na'eh, the Israeli ambassador in Manama.

She then left and asked the U.S. embassy to not publish any pictures of her attending the ceremony, according to the report.

Sheikha Mai has carried out official duties for more than 20 years. She previously served as the Bahraini information minister, the first woman to hold the office. She also served as Bahrain's culture minister and was named the sixth most powerful Arab woman of 2014 in a list compiled by Forbes Middle East.

Lately, Shaikha Mai reportedly opposed plans aimed at Judaization of Old Manama neighborhoods, such as Bab al-Bahrain in the central business district of Manama, and al-Mutanabbi Avenue.

On November 30 last year, Shaikha Mai hosted Israeli historian and socialist activist Ilan Pappé, who stresses on "the ethnic cleansing of Palestine," and is opposed to the ongoing occupation policies in the Palestinian territories conquered by Israel in 1967, and the prevention of the return of Palestinian refugees expelled during and after the 1948 Nakba, at the Sheikh Ibrahim Center.

Meanwhile, the Gaza-based Palestinian resistance groups have praised Sheikha Mai's refusal to shake hands with the Israeli ambassador in the Bahraini capital. Tariq Salmi, a spokesman for the Islamic Jihad movement, said in a press statement that his group voices solidarity with the former Bahraini minister, stressing that she took a practical and bold decision in rejection of normalization with Israel and did not care about possible consequences, and her action was an embodiment of the true will of free Palestinian men and women.

Sheikha Mai's refusal to shake hands with Na'eh is a "true reflection of the Bahraini people's genuine stance in support of Palestinians," Hamas spokesperson Hazem Qasem also said in a statement. The Palestinian resistance movement said all attempts to normalize ties with Israel will "remain unacceptable in the collective Arab consciousness."

Additionally, the Palestinian Mujahideen Movement hailed Shaikha Mai's decision, and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) called on all Arab peoples, including the Bahraini nation, to fiercely oppose normalization with the Tel Aviv regime.

Bahraini people have held numerous demonstrations in the country over the past two years to protest the Al Khalifah regime's decision to normalize ties with Israel through the so-called Abraham Accords, expressing their unswerving support for the Palestinian cause.

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