

URGENT ACTION

SHEIKH 'ALI SALMAN'S TRIAL RESUMES

The trial of leading opposition figure Sheikh 'Ali Salman resumed on 22 April in Bahrain. The court refused requests for his release on bail and set 20 May for the next hearing. He is a prisoner of conscience.

The trial of **Sheikh 'Ali Salman**, Secretary General of Bahrain's main opposition group, al-Wefaq National Islamic Society resumed on 22 April. It was the fourth hearing before the High Criminal Court in the capital, Manama. A trial observer representing Amnesty International was present at the hearing, as well as representatives of the UK and US embassies and his family, although some members of Bahraini civil society were not allowed in the room. The court rejected requests by Sheikh 'Ali Salman's defence lawyers to release him on bail and set the next hearing for 20 May for final pleadings.

During the 22 April session, his defence lawyers managed to bring and question defence witnesses, who were cross-examined by the Public Prosecution.

Sheikh 'Ali Salman has been charged with "incitement to promote the change of the political system by force, threats and other illegal means", "public incitement to loathing and contempt of a sect of people which will result in disrupting public disorder", "publicly inciting others to disobey the law" and "publicly insulting the Interior Ministry".

The charges apparently relate to remarks he made during his speech at the party's General Assembly. In that, he is reported to have reaffirmed his party's determination to pursue power in Bahrain through peaceful means, achieve the reform demands of the 2011 uprising and hold those responsible for human rights violations to account, while also stressing the need for equality for all in Bahrain, including the ruling family.

Please write immediately in English or Arabic:

- Calling on the Bahraini authorities to release Sheikh 'Ali Salman immediately and unconditionally, as he is a prisoner of conscience, held solely for peacefully exercising his right to freedom of expression;
- Urging them to uphold the right to freedom of expression and repeal laws that criminalize the peaceful exercise of the rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 5 JUNE 2015 TO:

King

Shaikh Hamad bin 'Issa Al Khalifa
Office of His Majesty the King
P.O. Box 555
Rifa'a Palace, al-Manama
Bahrain
Fax: +973 1766 4587

Salutation: Your Majesty

Minister of Interior

Shaikh Rashid bin 'Abdullah Al Khalifa
Ministry of Interior
P.O. Box 13, al-Manama
Bahrain
Fax: +973 1723 2661
Twitter: @moi_Bahrain

Salutation: Your Excellency

And copies to:

Minister of Justice and Islamic Affairs
Shaikh Khalid bin Ali Al Khalifa
Ministry of Justice and Islamic Affairs
P. O. Box 450, al-Manama
Bahrain
Fax: +973 1753 1284
Email via website:
<http://www.moj.gov.bh/en/>
Twitter: @Khaled_Bin_Ali

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Please insert local diplomatic addresses below:

Name Address 1 Address 2 Address 3 Fax Fax number Email Email address Salutation Salutation

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date. This is the first update of UA 22/15. Further information: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/MDE11/0004/2015/en/>

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Sheikh 'Ali Salman's trial before the Fourth High Criminal Court in Manama opened on 28 January 2015, in the presence of Amnesty International observers and diplomats representing several foreign governments. Sheikh 'Ali Salman denied the charges. The court adjourned the trial until 25 February, and then to 25 March.

The charges against Sheikh 'Ali Salman and the trial of other outspoken activists as a result of their peaceful exercise of the right to freedom of expression highlight the Bahraini authorities' increasing intolerance of criticism and their aim of silencing legitimate demands for reform and the respect of human rights.

Sheikh 'Ali Salman was not the only al-Wefaq leader behind bars in early 2015. In October 2014, the authorities charged **the** president of the al-Wefaq Consultative (Shura) Council, Sayed Jamil Kadhém, under the 2002 Law on Exercising Political Rights, with "violating freedom of the elections by disrupting and spreading false statements about them with a view to impacting their outcome." This occurred after he posted a message on Twitter about "political money" that he said had been offered to certain people to run as candidates in the November 2014 elections and in which he called for a boycott of the elections. He was sentenced to six months in prison on 13 January (see UA 40/15, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde11/0012/2015/en/>).

Since Sheikh 'Ali Salman's arrest, there have been demonstrations in a number of towns and villages in protest. In a familiar pattern, the security forces have used tear gas and shotguns to disperse the crowds. The authorities are believed to have refused to grant permission for people to demonstrate, denying them the rights to peaceful assembly. 'Ali Salman's arrest came a few days after he was re-elected for a fourth term as Secretary General of al-Wefaq.

In October 2014, a court ordered the party to suspend all activities for three months, but the Minister of Justice, who had filed the case on the basis of "irregularities", ordered a delay in the implementation of the court decision until after the party's general assembly meeting. Al-Wefaq boycotted the parliamentary elections held in November 2014, together with other opposition political parties.

Name: Sheikh 'Ali Salman
Gender m/f: m

Further information on UA: 22/15 Index: MDE 11/1518/2015 Issue Date: 24 April 2015