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Bahrain: detention of eight prisoners of conscience must come to an end

The administrative detention of eight men held for their non-violent political and religious activities must come to an end, Amnesty International said today.

"These men have been held without charge or trial for three years -- the maximum time allowed by law in the country. Their prolonged detention is in breach of the already oppressive Bahrain laws," the organization continued.

The eight people, al-Shaikh 'Abd al-Amir Mansur al-Jamri, al-Shaikh Hassan Sultan, al-Shaikh 'Ali 'Ashur, al-Shaikh 'Ali bin Ahmad al-Jeddahsi, al-Shaikh Hussain al-Deihi, Hassan Meshma'a, Sayyed Ibrahim 'Adnan al-'Alawi, 'Abd al-Wahab Hussain, all prominent Shi'a Muslim leaders, were arrested on 21 and 22 January 1996.

Their arrest followed mass protests against the closure by security forces of a number of mosques where prominent Shi'a Muslim leaders, including them, had been calling on the government to restore the National Assembly dissolved in 1975. Hundreds of other people were also arrested and held in incommunicado detention in connection with the protests.

Al-Shaikh al-Jamri, a well-known 62-year-old scholar and writer who was elected member of the dissolved National Assembly, had previously been arrested and detained without charge or trial for around five months in April 1995. His arrest then was also connected to widespread protests by demonstrators who called for the National Assembly to be restored and for the provisions of the country's 1973 Constitution to be respected.

Background

Article 1 of the Decree Law on State Security Measures, in force since 1974, allows for a maximum administrative detention of three years. Article 5 of the Decree Law stipulates that "... The detained person shall be released in any case on the last day of the three years referred to in the first article".

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