

URGENT ACTION

ACTIVIST RELEASED ON BAIL, STILL FACING CHARGES

Bahraini human rights activist Sayed Yousif Almuhafdah was released on bail on 17 January. His next trial hearing has been scheduled for 29 January.

Acting Vice President of the Bahrain Center for Human Rights, **Sayed Yousif Almuhafdah**, was released on bail of 100 Bahraini dinars (about US\$265) on 17 January 2013 when he appeared before the Lower Criminal Court in Manama, the capital of Bahrain. The next hearing in his case has been scheduled for 29 January, when witnesses are expected to appear in court.

Sayed Yousif Almuhafdah was arrested on 17 December 2012 at a protest in Manama while documenting clashes between demonstrators and the police; on the day he tweeted information about the events and a picture of an injured protester. On 20 December the Deputy Public Prosecutor reportedly said that the publication of the picture "resulted in protests and acts of sabotage that disrupted security and order on the same day" and that Sayed Yousif Almuhafdah had denied publishing the picture. He has been formally charged under Article 168 of the Bahrain Penal Code, which criminalizes the act of spreading false news with the intention of causing damage to state security. Sayed Yousif Almuhafdah's trial started on 9 January 2013 before the Lower Criminal Court. He denied the charges.

Sayed Yousif Almuhafdah was arrested and released without charge several times between August and December 2012 after participating in or monitoring protests. Amnesty International believes that the real reason for targeting him is related to his human rights work as Vice President of the Bahrain Center for Human Rights.

The 1998 UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders expressly reaffirms the right to freedom of expression guaranteed under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), by which human rights defenders have the right to "freely publish, impart or disseminate to others views, information and knowledge on all human rights" and to draw public attention to their observance, both in law and in practice.

Please write immediately in English or Arabic:

- Calling on the authorities to drop the charges against Sayed Yousif Almuhafdah since they are related solely to the legitimate exercise of his right to freedom of expression;
- Urging them to respect and protect the rights to freedom of expression and assembly and ensure that all human rights organizations and human rights defenders are able to carry out their work without hindrance, intimidation or harassment.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 28 FEBRUARY 2013 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 (keep trying)

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 bin Abdullah Al

Khalifa

Ministry of Justice and Islamic Affairs

P. O. Box 450, al-Manama, Bahrain

Fax: +973 1753 1284

Salutation: Your Excellency

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country.

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date. This is the first update of UA 8/13. Further information:

<http://amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE11/002/2013/en>

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Sayed Yousif Almuhafdah was first arrested on 15 August 2012 after he took a picture of a checkpoint in A'ali town, south-west of Manama, and posted it on Twitter. He was stopped on the road by the traffic police. He said he was beaten by a policeman and detained for two hours, after which he filed a complaint at the Public Prosecutor's Office. It is not known whether his complaint was investigated.

He was again arrested on 11 September 2012 at a checkpoint near his house in A'ali town and detained in a police station for three hours. He was released without being questioned and no charges were brought against him. He was re-arrested on 20 October 2012 while walking on the side of the road with two other human rights activists towards al-Eker town, as they heard rumours that the town was under siege. All three were detained for several hours and again released without charge. He was again arrested on 2 November 2012 in Diraz village in north-west Manama for reportedly monitoring a gathering taking place and the police behaviour towards protesters. He was again released on 16 November and the charges against him were dropped.

Among the recommendations accepted by Bahrain in the Universal Periodic Review of 2012 are those calling on the government to abandon restrictions on human rights defenders. Since then, however, human rights defenders and other activists in Bahrain have continued to be harassed, arrested and even imprisoned for their human rights activities.

The human rights situation in Bahrain has markedly deteriorated in recent months, with repressive practices increasingly entrenched and government disregard for the recommendations of the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry (BICI) becoming more flagrant. The BICI was set up to investigate widespread human rights violations during an uprising which broke out in February 2011.

The BICI, appointed by Royal Order on 29 June 2011, included five renowned international legal and human rights experts, charged with investigating and reporting on human rights violations committed in connection to the 2011 protests. At the launch of the BICI report in November 2011, the government publicly committed itself to implementing the recommendations set out in the report. The report recounted the government's response to the mass protests and documented wide-ranging human rights abuses. Among its key recommendations, the report called on the government to bring to account those responsible for human rights violations, including torture and excessive use of force, and to carry out independent investigations into allegations of torture.

However, many of the government's pledges remain unfulfilled. The establishment of BICI and its report was considered to be a groundbreaking initiative, but more than a year on, the promise of meaningful reform has been betrayed by the government's unwillingness to implement key recommendations around accountability; this includes its failure to carry out independent, effective and transparent investigations into allegations of torture and other ill-treatment and excessive use of force, and to prosecute all those who gave the orders to commit human rights abuses. For further information see: *Bahrain: Reform shelved, repression unleashed* (Index: MDE 11/062/2012), published in November 2012 (<http://amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE11/062/2012/en>).

Name: Sayed Yousif Almuhafdah
Gender m/f: m

Further information on UA: 8/13 Index: MDE 11/004/2013 Issue Date: 17 January 2013