

EXTERNAL

AI Index: MDE 11/09/96

UA 105/96

Fear of Torture/ Legal Concerns

18 April 1996

BAHRAINSa'id al-'Asboul, civil engineer, aged 42

Amnesty International is concerned by reports that Sa'id al-'Asboul, an engineer and businessman, is being held in incommunicado detention and fears that he may be at risk of torture. It is believed that he may be held solely for his non-violent political activities.

Sa'id al-'Asboul was arrested at his home in Al-Sanabes on the night of 14 April 1996 by security forces who also searched his home. His whereabouts are unknown, but he has reportedly been moved to an unspecified hospital. He is known to have a back problem. No reason was given for his arrest. When his family inquired about him at the main investigation office, they were told he was not there. They have received no further information.

Sa'id al-'Asboul is a member of a group known as the Petition Council, a group made up of 14 members representing different political tendencies, including Shi'a and Sunni religious scholars and non-religious political activists. In 1994, the Council presented a petition signed by 25,000 people to the Amir 'Issa bin Salman Al-Khalifa calling for the restoration of parliament, dissolved in 1975, and the reinstatement of the 1973 constitution.

Sa'id al-'Asboul was later dismissed from his job as manager at the Ministry of Works. Other sponsors of the petition were also dismissed from their jobs or banned from travel.

Sa'id al-'Asboul and other members of the Petition Council had recently been attempting to approach the Amir with their pro-democracy demands. Some opposition activists and lawyers believe his arrest may be connected to the recent efforts.

Other Petition Council members have also been arrested, including Ahmad al-Shamlan, a Sunni lawyer and writer, who was arrested on 7 February 1996, and is to appear before the State Security Court on 17 April 1996 (see **UA 29/96 MDE 11/03/96**).

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Sa'id al-'Asboul's arrest comes as the Government of Bahrain continues to carry out mass arbitrary arrests, often following peaceful pro-democracy demonstrations and sometimes after violent clashes with security forces. Renewed unrest erupted in November 1995 following a few months of calm after heavy disturbances between December 1994 and April 1995 in which at least ten people were killed, many more wounded and about 4,000 detained. Two people died in custody in circumstances strongly indicating that torture may have been the cause of death.

Most of the detainees recently arrested have been held in incommunicado detention and there have been at least two reports of torture during the initial investigation period.

Among those detained are Shaikh 'Abd al-Amir Mansur al-Jamri and Abdel-Wahab Hussein, also members of the Petition Council. They and six other prominent clerics and leaders were arrested on 22 January 1996, about four months after

their release from detention following unrest in 1994 and early 1995 (see UA 26/96 MDE 11/02/96).

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/telexes/faxes/express/airmail letters in English, Arabic, or your own language:

- seeking information about the current whereabouts of Sa'id al-'Asboul, the reasons for his arrest, and details of any charges and trial proceedings against him;
- calling for his immediate release if he is held solely for his non-violent political activities;
- urging the prompt release of anyone else held in connection with political unrest, unless they are to be charged with recognizably criminal offences;
- seeking assurances that all detainees are being treated humanely and urging that they be granted immediate access to lawyers, relatives and independent doctors if necessary;

If possible, please organize appeals from engineers

APPEALS TO:

His Highness

Shaikh 'Issa Bin Salman Al Khalifa

Office of His Highness the Amir

P.O. Box 555

The Amiri Court, Rifa'a Palace, Bahrain

Telexes: 8666 Qasar BN; 8500 Qasar BN

Telegrams: His Highness the Amir, al-Manama, Bahrain

Faxes: +973 668884

Salutation: Your Highness

His Excellency

Shaikh Muhammad Bin Khalifa Al Khalifa

Minister of Interior

P.O. Box 13, al-Manama, Bahrain

Telexes: 9572 PSMKT BN or 8333 ALAMAN BN

Telegrams: Minister of Interior, al-Manama, Bahrain

Faxes: +973 276765 or 290526

Salutation: Your Excellency

His Excellency

Shaikh Khalifa Bin Salman Al Khalifa

Prime Minister

P.O. Box 1000, al-Manama, Bahrain

Telexes: 9336 PROM BN or 7889 PMPO BN

Faxes: +973 533033

Salutation: Your Excellency

COPIES TO: diplomatic representatives of Bahrain accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 29 May 1996.