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## **Bahrain: International pressure needed now to halt spiralling human rights crisis**

Bahrain's allies must take stronger action to address the rapidly worsening human rights crisis in the small but strategic Gulf state, Amnesty International said today as it released a new briefing paper on the continuing suppression of peaceful protest.

In [\*Bahrain: A Human Rights Crisis\*](#), Amnesty International calls on governments with close ties to Bahrain to press for an end to the crackdown on those calling for change.

"North American and European governments, so vocal recently in espousing the cause of human rights in Libya, Tunisia and Egypt, need also to speak out loudly about what is going on in Bahrain" said Malcolm Smart, Amnesty International's director for the Middle East and North Africa.

"To avoid the charge of double standards, they must be much more robust in pressing the Bahraini authorities to uphold their international human rights obligations."

The organization said that on 16 March the Bahraini government launched a clearly planned and orchestrated crackdown using excessive force to suppress protests calling for political change and reform.

Security forces used shotguns, rubber bullets, tear gas and, in some cases, live ammunition, sometimes at very close range, and in circumstances where the use of weapons such as shotguns and other firearms could not be justified.

Requests by Amnesty International delegates who visited Bahrain from 1-8 April for meetings with senior security and military officials responsible for law enforcement were refused, the authorities saying that information on orders given to police and security forces was considered a "state secret".

The government's relentless crackdown, its declaration of a "State of National Safety" and the use of this to arrest and detain incommunicado protesters and political activists has further exacerbated tension between Sunni and Shi'a Muslim communities, the briefing paper said.

More than 500 people have been arrested in the last month. The vast majority are Shi'a Muslims who were active during the protests. In virtually all cases, weeks after their arrest, their whereabouts remain unknown.

Some detainees have reportedly been tortured or otherwise ill-treated following arrest. At least four detainees are known to have died in custody in suspicious circumstances.

The detainees include medical doctors and nurses, mainly from the Salmaniya Medical Complex, Bahrain's main hospital. The exact reasons for their arrest are not known but they appear to have been targeted for allegedly supporting protests by treating protesters, criticising the government in the media

and participating in the protests.

Witnesses told Amnesty International that during the crackdown in March, security forces fired tear gas at the complex, where some protesters, including injured people receiving medical treatment, were also said to have been arrested and taken away.

Security forces were also alleged to have encircled the centre and prevented injured protesters gaining access to medical care.

Other sources, however, allege that some medical staff refused to treat Asian workers who had been injured while the government maintains that its forces took control of the complex because it was being used as a base by protesters.

Amnesty International found that despite the conflicting reports, it appears that both the security forces and some opposition protesters flouted the medical neutrality of the Salmaniya Medical Complex.

Hundreds of people who joined the protests have been dismissed from their employment in government service, state institutions and private companies, including university lecturers, school teachers and medical doctors and nurses. Many workers were not paid in March.

The justification for dismissals is generally that employees breached their terms of employment by protesting, but in practice it appears that the government is seeking to signal that those continuing to protest will face adverse consequences, including to their livelihoods.

“The last month has seen a dramatic deterioration in human rights conditions in Bahrain,” said Malcolm Smart.

“Bahrainis need to see their government acting decisively and transparently to reverse this downward trend and begin a process of rebuilding trust and confidence in its institutions.”

[\*Bahrain: A Human Rights Crisis\*](#)

## **Background**

This report is based on the findings of a three-person Amnesty International delegation that visited Bahrain from 1- 8 April 2011, following previous visits in February and in late 2010, and Amnesty International’s ongoing monitoring of developments in the intervening periods.