

URGENT ACTION

ACTIVISTS RELEASED FOLLOWING BAHRAIN PROTESTS

A group of 23 opposition activists detained in Bahrain since August 2010 were released last night following calls from the Bahraini population for their release.

The group of 23 activists, including leading members of Bahrain's Sh'ia community, were detained in August 2010 before their trial in October 2010. During their pre-trial detainment they were held incommunicado for 15 days without access to lawyers or family members. They were all accused of plotting to overthrow the government using "terrorism" and other means. The 23 were released in the early hours of 23 February following massive protests that started in Bahrain on 14 February and called for the release of political prisoners and political reforms, amongst other demands. Since 14 February seven protesters have been killed by the riot police and hundreds have been injured.

The 23 are amongst a broader group of political and other prisoners whose release was ordered by the King of Bahrain, Shaikh Hamad bin 'Issa Al Khalifa, last Monday.

The sister of one of the detainees told Amnesty International today: "I am really happy about my brother's release. It was like celebrating a birthday. They were born again. At 1am last night they started opening the gates and the 23 left one by one. We were so happy to see my brother!"

At their first trial session on 28 October 2010 all of the 23 defendants denied the charges against them, and most told the court that they had been tortured or otherwise ill-treated in pre-trial detention. Some also said that security officials had threatened them the day before the trial, warning them that they should not complain about their treatment to the court or they could face further torture. During the following weeks the trial was postponed after the lawyers representing the activists withdrew from the case to protest at the lack of an independent investigation into allegations of torture or other ill-treatment. The trial was again delayed when the detainees refused to be represented by a new set of lawyers assigned by the court.

Thank you for sending appeals on their behalf. There is no need for any further action

This is the third update of UA 195/10. Further information: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/mde11/005/2010/en> ,
<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/mde11/007/2010/en> and <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/mde11/010/2010/en>

URGENT ACTION

ACTIVISTS RELEASED FOLLOWING BAHRAIN PROTESTS

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The 'Day of Rage' protests were called for on several websites, Facebook and Twitter. The protests were organized to coincide with the 10th anniversary of the endorsement of Bahrain's National Action Charter. Inspired by the protests in Tunisia and Egypt, the protesters have been demanding more freedom, the release of all political prisoners, a new constitution and an elected government. The largest Shi'a political group, al-Wefaq, reportedly suspended its participation in parliament on the 15th of February in protest at the death of the two protestors and the methods used by the police. Since the beginning of protests on 14 February, 7 protesters have been killed and hundreds have been injured.

The human rights situation in Bahrain has deteriorated markedly in the last 12 months. Amnesty International published a report on 11 February detailing human rights abuses in the country "Crackdown in Bahrain: human rights at the crossroads" (MDE 11/001/2011, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE11/001/2011/en>)

FU UA: 195/10 Index: MDE 11/007/2011 Issue Date: 24 February 2011