

TO: HEALTH PROFESSIONALS
FROM: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

APPEAL FOR ACTION

TRIAL OF HEALTH PROFESSIONALS CONTINUES IN BAHRAIN

Forty-eight health professionals, all possible prisoners of conscience, appeared before a military court on 13 June accused of felonies and misdemeanours. All of them pleaded not guilty and those still in detention have had very limited access to their lawyers. The trial will resume on 20 June.

The trial of 48 health professionals, including paramedics, nurses and doctors, resumed on 13 June before the National Safety Court of First Instance, a military court established under the state of emergency in force from 15 March to 1 June 2011. The 48 health staff are split into two groups, one accused of felonies and the other group accused of misdemeanours.

The trial started on 6 June, but it was adjourned after the lawyers of the 48 health professionals complained about not having been allowed to meet with their clients. The court decided to postpone the trial until 13 June. Thirty-three of the 48 medical staff are still in detention and have only been allowed to meet with their lawyers for a very limited amount of time (around 10 minutes) on three occasions: after the first court session on 6 June and before and after the second court session on 13 June. According to reports, at least four of the doctors still in detention were not present in court on 13 June.

Dr 'Ali al-'Ekri, Rula al-Saffar, head of the Nursing Society, and Dr Zahra al-Sammak told the court that torture had been used against them to extract confessions and that they signed confessions while being blindfolded. The judge asked them to limit their answers to guilty or not guilty. Dr Zahra al-Sammak was escorted outside the court after telling the judge that she was tortured. Another doctor requested permission to speak to the judge through their lawyers but the request was refused.

The proceedings against those accused of felonies (20 health workers) will resume on 20 June while the proceedings against those accused of misdemeanours (28 health workers) will resume on 27 June.

The lawyers requested that the defendants who claimed they had been subjected to torture receive a medical examination. At least one of the defendants was reportedly tortured or otherwise ill-treated after the first court hearing on 6 June. The court agreed to refer defendants who said they had been tortured to forensic doctors for examination. It also agreed to bring in prosecution witnesses for questioning as requested by the defence team.

Representatives of the US government and foreign media were present during the trial of the group accused of felonies. However, no foreign observer was present during the session of those accused of misdemeanours.

PLEASE WRITE IMMEDIATELY:

- Explaining that you are a health professional concerned about human rights;
- Urging the authorities to carry out an immediate and independent investigation into the allegations of torture and other ill-treatment against some of the 48 health professionals, as well as against other detainees in Bahrain, to make the results public, and to bring to justice any officials responsible for the torture or other ill-treatment of detainees.

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- Urging the authorities to ensure that confessions obtained under torture are not submitted or used as evidence in the trial of the 48 health professionals or any other trials in Bahrain and that the 48 health professionals and other detainees are permitted immediate and regular access to lawyers of their own choosing, their relatives and any medical treatment that they may require;
- Expressing concern that, despite the serious charges brought against them, the 48 health professionals appear to have been detained and brought to trial solely because of their peaceful efforts to provide medical assistance to people injured by government security forces during popular protests in February and March, in which case they would be prisoners of conscience and should be immediately and unconditionally released.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 30/07/2011 TO:

Minister of Social Development,
Health and Human Rights

Dr Fatima bint Mohammed Al
Balooshi
Ministry of Social Development
PO Box 32868, Isa Town,
Bahrain
Fax: +973 17101955
Salutation: Your Excellency

King Shaikh Hamad bin 'Issa Al
Khalifa

Office of His Majesty the King
P.O. Box 555
Rifa'a Palace, al-Manama,
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Fax: + 73 17664587
Salutation: Your Majesty

Commander-in-Chief of the
Bahrain Defence Force

Marshal Shaikh Khalifa bin
Ahmed Al Khalifa
Bahrain Defence Force
Riffa Road
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e-mail: dgcbdf@gmail.com
Fax: +973 17663923
Salutation: Your Excellency

IF YOU RECEIVE NO REPLY WITHIN SIX WEEKS OF SENDING YOUR LETTER, PLEASE SEND A FOLLOW-UP LETTER SEEKING A RESPONSE. PLEASE SEND COPIES OF ANY LETTERS YOU RECEIVE TO THE INTERNATIONAL SECRETARIAT, ATTENTION OF THE HEALTH TEAM, 1 EASTON STREET, LONDON WC1X 0DW OR E-MAIL: health@amnesty.org

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