

URGENT ACTION

BAHRAINI HEALTH PROFESSIONALS SENTENCED

Twenty health professionals were sentenced by a military court in Bahrain on 29 September to between five and 15 years in prison. Amnesty International believes that the charges were politically motivated, that the proceedings did not meet international fair trial standards and that they may be prisoners of conscience.

On 29 September, Bahrain's National Safety Court of First Instance, a military court, announced its verdict in the trial of 20 health professionals accused of felonies, including well-known surgeons. Thirteen of the group were sentenced to 15 years in prison, two to 10 years and five to five years.

The 20 were arrested in March and April 2011. Many of them were held incommunicado for several weeks and were reportedly tortured in detention and forced to sign confessions. All of the group were released on bail between August and September. They were sentenced on 29 September in a trial session that only lasted several minutes, convicted on charges including "possession of unlicensed weapons", "attempting to occupy by force a public building" (namely the Salmaniya Medical Complex in Manama, Bahrain's capital), "calling for regime change"; "seizure of medical equipment", "spreading false news", "public gathering without authorization", "carrying out unnecessary operations resulting in the deaths of patients" and "denying patients' treatment on sectarian bases". The defendants had denied all the charges against them. None of the 20 were present in court during the sentencing. Their lawyers say they will appeal the verdict before the High Court of Appeal, a civilian court.

At the trial, the military prosecution is reported to have failed to provide any substantive evidence that the accused used or advocated violence during the popular protests in February and March. Amnesty International believes that the health professionals should never have been tried before a military court, that the real reason they were charged may be because some of them had denounced the government crackdown on protesters in interviews to international media and that consequently they may be prisoners of conscience detained solely for peacefully exercising their rights to freedom of expression and assembly.

Please write immediately in English or Arabic:

- Express concern that the 20 health professionals were sentenced by a military court after what appears to have been an unfair and politically motivated trial;
- Express concern that many or all of the defendants may be prisoners of conscience imprisoned solely on account of peacefully exercising their rights to freedom of expression and assembly, and call for the immediate and unconditional release of all prisoners of conscience being held in Bahrain;
- Urge the authorities to immediately set up an independent investigation into the alleged torture or other ill-treatment of some of the defendants, to make its results public, and bring to justice anyone responsible.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 11 NOVEMBER 2011 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: +973 176 64 587/ +973 17664587

Salutation: Your Majesty

Prime Minister

Prince Khalifa bin Salman Al Khalifa
Prime Minister
Office of the Prime Minister
P.O. Box 1000, al-Manama, Bahrain
Fax: +973 175 33 033

Salutation: Your Highness

Minister of Justice and Islamic Affairs

Sheikh Khalid bin Ali Al Khlaifa
Ministry of Justice and Islamic Affairs,
Shaikh Khalid bin Ali bin Abdullah Al Khalifa
P.O. Box 13, al-Manama, Bahrain
Fax: +973 175 31 284

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.

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**



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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The 20 individuals sentenced on 29 September are among 48 health professionals from the Salmaniya Medical Complex who were arrested in March and April 2011. Some of them had been vocal in giving interviews to foreign media and accusing the government of atrocities against protesters. All were held incommunicado for several weeks. In most cases their families did not know their whereabouts for most of this time and were only allowed to see them during the first session of the trial that started on 6 June. The 48 were split into two groups on 13 June: 20 of them were accused of felonies, or more serious offences, while the remaining were accused of misdemeanours, or less serious offences. Many of them started hunger strike in protest at their detention and trial and were gradually released on bail in August and September 2011.

'Ali 'Esa Mansoor al-'Ekri, Nader Mohammed Hassan Dewani, Ahmed 'Abdulaziz Omran Hassan, Mahmood Asghar 'Abdulwahab, 'Abdulkhaleq 'Ali Hussain al-'Oraibi, Ghassan Ahmed 'Ali Dhaif, Bassim Ahmed 'Ali Dhaif, Ebrahim 'Abdullah Ebrahim, Sayed Marhoon Majid al-Wedaei; Roula Jassim Mohammed al-Saffar, Nada Sa'eed 'Abdelnabi Dhaif, 'Ali Hassan al-Sadadi and Qassim Mohammad 'Omran were sentenced to 15 years in prison. Hassan Mohammed Sa'eed Nasser and Sa'eed Mothaher Habib Al Samahiji were sentenced to 10 years' imprisonment. Fatima Salman Hassan Haji, Dhia Ibrahim Ja'far, Najah Khalil Ibrahim Hassan, Zahra Mahdi al-Sammak and Mohammed Faeq 'Ali Al Shehab were sentenced to five years in prison.

The arrests of the health professionals followed a crackdown on anti-government protesters in Bahrain in mid-March. On 16 March the government sent in the security forces, backed by helicopters and tanks, to storm the Pearl Roundabout area and forcibly evict the protesters gathered there. In the ensuing clashes, at least two protesters and two police officers were reported killed and dozens of people were injured by the security forces as they violently cleared the area of protesters. The security forces also took similar action to forcibly evict protesters from the nearby Financial Harbour area.

As in mid-February 2011, when conducting these and other actions against the protesters, the security forces used 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 on the grounds that this was necessary to protect their own or others' lives. Such excessive force was used in Manama and also, according to information gathered by Amnesty International, in Sitra, Nuwaiderat and al-Ma'ameer. Witnesses told Amnesty International that soldiers and other security forces had fired tear gas at people close to the entrance to the Sitra Medical Centre and at the Salmaniya Medical Complex, where some protesters, including injured people receiving medical treatment were also said to have been arrested and taken away.

As the military and security forces took control of the Pearl Roundabout, the Financial Harbour and the Salmaniya Medical Complex, they launched an orchestrated crackdown on Shi'a political and community leaders and activists who had been prominent in leading the protests and who had publicly criticized members of the royal family and called for a change of government during protests at the Pearl Roundabout or other demonstrations and marches. Hundreds of people have since been arrested and many are on trial and have been sentenced on charges including "inciting hatred towards the regime".

Names: 'Ali 'Esa Mansoor al-'Ekri (m), Nader Mohammed Hassan Dewani (m), Ahmed 'Abdulaziz Omran Hassan (m), Mahmood Asghar 'Abdulwahab (m), 'Abdulkhaleq 'Ali Hussain al-'Oraibi (m), Ghassan Ahmed 'Ali Dhaif (m), Bassim Ahmed 'Ali Dhaif (m), Ebrahim 'Abdullah Ebrahim (m);, Sayed Marhoon Majid al-Wedaei (m); Roula Jassim Mohammed al-Saffar (f), Nada Sa'eed 'Abdelnabi Dhaif (f), 'Ali Hassan al-Sadadi (m), Qassim Mohammad 'Omran (m) Hassan Mohammed Sa'eed Nasser (m), Sa'eed Mothaher Habib Al Samahiji (m), Fatima Salman Hassan Haji (f), Dhia Ibrahim Ja'far (f), Najah Khalil Ibrahim Hassan (f), Zahra Mahdi al-Sammak (f) and Mohammed Faeq 'Ali Al Shehab (m)

