

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT

AI Index: MDE 11/026/2013

31 July 2013

## **BAHRAIN: NEW ANTI-TERRORISM POWERS WOULD POSE FURTHER RISK TO HUMAN RIGHTS**

Amnesty International warns against the imminent adoption of proposed amendments by the Bahraini authorities to the anti-terrorism legislation as it will lead to further violations of Bahrain's international human rights obligations.

In response to recent increase in violence and in anticipation of planned large demonstrations by the opposition, on 28 July Bahrain's parliament held an extraordinary session and then submitted 22 recommendations to Shaikh Hamad Bin 'Issa Al Khalifa, the King of Bahrain. The recommendations toughen punishments laid out in the 2006 anti-terrorism law. On 29 July the King welcomed the recommendations and ordered his Prime Minister to ensure that they are implemented urgently by the government. Bahrain's constitution (Article 38) gives the King the power to issue decrees that have the force of law when parliament is in recess. In these circumstances the government prepares the draft amendments and the King ratifies them.

The recommendations include the banning of all sit-ins, public gatherings and demonstrations in the capital Manama indefinitely, giving the security forces additional sweeping powers to "protect society from all terrorist acts and incitement to such acts"; increasing punishment for anyone propagating false information about Bahrain in social media networks; taking legal action against certain political associations which incite and support violent and terrorist acts; taking all possible measures to impose peace and security, even if it means imposing a state of national safety (state of emergency); and the imposition of harsher sentences on anyone involved in acts of "terrorism" and violence and anyone inciting others to use violence; the revocation of Bahraini nationality from anyone committing terrorist acts or incitement to such activities,

Given the manner in which authorities have abused existing legislation to suppress dissent, Amnesty International fears that these recommended amendments will further erode the rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly.

The 2006 anti-terrorism legislation, known as "Protecting Society from Terrorist Acts," defines terrorism in an overly broad and ambiguous manner. Amnesty International has expressed concern about provisions in the law that place arbitrary restrictions on freedom of expression and gives the Public Prosecution excessive discretion. The UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism expressed fears in 2006 that the restrictions on freedom of association and assembly in the law would allow the criminalization of peaceful demonstrations by civil society. The UN Committee against Torture expressed in 2005 concerns about the broad and vague definition of terrorism and terrorist organizations and the erosion of judicial safeguards in the then draft law.

Since February 2011 when large anti-government protests started the human rights situation in Bahrain has deteriorated sharply. Scores of opposition activists were arrested and tried before military courts. Many were tortured. Some, including 13 prominent figures, are serving

lengthy sentences of up to life. Dozens of people died, including from torture, but mainly as a result of unnecessary and excessive use of force during protests. Human rights activists have been jailed for their work.

In recent weeks violence has increased. There have been incidents where young men threw Molotov cocktails at policemen and police cars. On 17 July a car bomb exploded near al-Riffa', south of Manama. No one was hurt and the bombing was condemned by opposition parties. The security forces have responded with mass arrests, excessive use of force, including through the use of shot-guns and tear gas, and reportedly torture and other ill-treatment of detained suspects. In the early hours of 29 July at least 27 people, mostly youth, were arrested in the village of Dar Kulaib where clashes between security forces and protestors had taken place.

Despite these measures sporadic protests have continued. Bahraini opposition groups are planning to organise large protests on 14 August. Planning for this has started on social media networks. The event is called "Tamarrod" (rebellion).