

EXTERNAL

AI Index: MDE 11/09/97

UA 317/97 Fear of torture / Possible prisoner of conscience 7 October 1997

BAHRAIN Muhammad Ahmad Jum'a Shafi'i, aged 35

Muhammad Ahmad Jum'a Shafi'i is reported to be in incommunicado detention in the al-Qal'a compound in al-Manama, where he remains at risk of torture or ill-treatment.

Muhammad Ahmad Jum'a Shafi'i is reported to have been arrested at his home in Hamad Town on 3 September 1997. The reason for his arrest is unclear, but it is believed to be connected with his transmitting information about the internal situation in Bahrain during a telephone conversation with persons abroad (see below).

Muhammad Ahmad Jum'a Shafi'i is married and has three children.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The human rights situation in Bahrain has remained serious since anti-government unrest erupted in December 1994. Among the protesters' demands are the restoration of the National Assembly (Parliament), dissolved by the Amir, Shaikh 'Issa bin Salman Al Khalifa, in 1975, and the release of political prisoners. Amnesty International estimates that between 1,000 and 1,500 political prisoners and detainees, including prisoners of conscience, are currently being held, the majority without charge or trial. Torture and ill-treatment are still rife. Since March 1996 more than 200 people have been convicted after unfair trials before the State Security Court. Three people remain on death row.

The Bahraini authorities continue to take steps to prevent the dissemination of information abroad about the internal situation in the country, including human rights violations. For example, there are reports that individuals who have access to the Internet either at home or in their workplace are being monitored, and those suspected of disseminating information abroad are then arrested and their computer equipment seized. On 6 March 1997, Sayyid Jalal Sayyid 'Alawi Sayyid Sharaf was arrested at his home in al-Duraz. He was suspected of transmitting information about the internal situation in Bahrain to persons abroad (see EXTRA 42/97, MDE 11/05/97, 25 March 1997). He is believed to remain held without charge or trial.

Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states: "*Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers*".

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/telexes/faxes/express/airmail letters in English, Arabic or your own language:

- expressing concern at the continued incommunicado detention of Muhammad Ahmad Jum'a Shafi'i;
- seeking assurances that he is being treated humanely, and urging that he be granted immediate and continuing access to lawyers, relatives and medical care if needed, and that he is given the opportunity to challenge the legality of his detention before a court of law;
- seeking clarification of the reasons for his arrest and urging his immediate and unconditional release if he is being held solely for non-violently exercising his rights to freedom of expression as proclaimed in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

APPEALS TO:

His Excellency

Shaikh Muhammad bin Khalifa Al Khalifa

Minister of Interior

P.O. Box 13, al-Manama, Bahrain

Telexes: 9572 PSMKT BN or 8333 ALAMAN BN

Telegrams: Minister of Interior, al-Manama, Bahrain

Faxes: +973 276765 or 290526

Salutation: Your Excellency

COPIES TO: diplomatic representatives of Bahrain accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 21 November 1997