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## **Bahrain urged to halt execution of protesters**

Authorities in Bahrain must not allow the execution of four protesters sentenced to death by a military court over the killing of two police officers in anti-government demonstrations last month, Amnesty International said today.

“The Bahraini authorities have a responsibility to bring to justice those who commit violent crimes. But when doing so, they must uphold the right to fair trial and they must not use the death penalty under any circumstances,” said Malcolm Smart, Amnesty International’s Director for the Middle East and North Africa.

“In this case, the accused were tried before a special military court, although they are civilians. It also appears that the trial was conducted behind closed doors. As well, those sentenced have no right of appeal except to another special military court, raising great fears about the fairness of the entire process.”

The court sentenced Ali Abdullah Hassan al-Sankis, Qassim Hassan Matar, Saeed Abduljalil Saeed and Abdulaziz Abdulridha Ibrahim Hussain to death on 28 April.

Three other defendants tried with them, Issa Abdullah Kadhim Ali, Sadeq Ali Mahdi and Hussein Jaafar Abdulkarim, were sentenced to life in prison by the same court. All seven accused are reported to have denied the charges.

The death sentences can be appealed in Bahrain’s military court. However, should the appeal fail, the final verdict cannot be appealed in Bahrain’s ordinary courts. The four men could therefore face imminent execution.

The seven men were accused of the premeditated murder of two policemen by running them over with a vehicle on 16 March. On 15 March, Bahrain’s King had declared a state of emergency – termed the State of National Safety (SNS) – after Saudi Arabia sent in a thousand troops to help the government quell anti-government protests.

The seven accused are believed to have been held incommunicado following their arrests and the families are said to have been denied access to them, Amnesty International has learnt.

Government officials reportedly said that a total of four policemen have been killed during protests in March.

King Hamad bin ‘Issa Al Khalifa imposed the state of emergency for three months but it may be renewed with the approval of the National Council or parliament. It provided for the establishment of a special military court to try those accused of offences under the emergency and a special military appeal court.

Since the SNS was imposed, more than 500 people have been arrested with many of them detained incommunicado and at undisclosed locations. At least four have died in detention in suspicious

circumstances since the end of March.

Local media reports say 312 detainees were released today. The government's Information Affairs Authority has told the media that more than 400 other cases have been referred to the military courts.

Many of the detainees were taken from their homes, often at night, by groups of police and security forces who wore masks, failed to produce arrest warrants and sometimes assaulted those they wished to detain and members of their families.

"Bahrain is in the grip of a deepening human rights crisis and the severity of the sentences imposed today, following a military trial behind closed doors, will do nothing to reverse that," said Malcolm Smart.

"King Hamad bin Issa Al Khalifa must urgently make it clear that he will not allow these death sentences to be carried out."

In 2010, two Bangladeshi nationals were sentenced to death in Bahrain. Jassim Abdulmanan was executed in June and Russell Mezan was sentenced to death in March. His death sentence was upheld in October. Only foreign nationals have been sentenced to death and executed in Bahrain in recent years.

Executions carried out in Bahrain are normally by firing squad.