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Public Statement

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Bahrain: Human rights defenders under threat

Amnesty International is calling on the Bahrain government to investigate several cases in which human rights defenders in the Gulf kingdom have been subjected to harassment, including prosecution on false criminal charges, threats or assault in recent months. The organization is urging the government to establish an independent and impartial investigation into these incidents and to prosecute or take disciplinary action against any state officials found responsible for human rights violations.

In one recent case, Abdel-Raouf Al-Shayeb, head of the National Committee of Martyrs and Victims of Torture, was charged with involvement in a prostitution network in Bahrain and sentenced in his absence to a one year prison term on 1 July 2006. He was said to have used a false marriage certificate to facilitate the entry into Bahrain of a woman from Uzbekistan and to have profited from her activities throughout 2003, although he denies ever having met the woman and filed a complaint with the police when he first learnt that some individuals had falsely used his name to bring this woman into Bahrain. The police, however, apparently failed to adequately investigate his complaint, a copy of which has been seen by Amnesty International. He has lodged an appeal against his conviction and sentence but is now in London because he fears for his safety should he return to Bahrain.

In the early hours of 6 July, Abbas 'Abd 'Ali, a member of the Committee of the Unemployed, was allegedly dragged from his car and physically assaulted near his home after he confirmed that he is the brother of Musa 'Abd 'Ali, one of the founders of the Committee of the Unemployed. Apparently, once he acknowledged his identity, several cars containing men in plain clothes surrounded his vehicle, from which he was then pulled and severely assaulted. He was found unconscious hours later and required hospital treatment for the injuries he sustained.

Musa 'Abd 'Ali was previously taken forcibly from near his home at around 1.00 am on 29 November 2005 by men in plain clothes who took him to an isolated place nearby in al-Manama's al-'Akr al-Gharbi district. There, he was reportedly beaten, stripped of his clothes and threatened with sexual assault unless he and other members of the Committee of the Unemployed ceased their activities. Following this incident, Amnesty International wrote to the Bahraini authorities to urge them to establish a prompt and independent investigation, but without response. An investigation was reportedly initiated, however, but its outcome, if any, is not known to Amnesty International.

Amnesty International is urging the Bahrain government to ensure that human rights defenders are free from harassment, threat or intimidation in line with the requirements of the United Nations Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms. It is calling on Bahrain to set a particular example in this respect in view of Bahrain's recent successful campaign for election to the newly established UN Human Rights Council, during which the Bahraini authorities gave a specific pledge on 25 April 2006 to

protect and uphold human rights.