

URGENT ACTION

DOUBTS ABOUT TORTURE INVESTIGATION

Bahraini photojournalist Ahmad Fardan was released on bail on 9 January pending investigation on a new charge of “involvement in a Molotov cocktail attack on police in December”. He has said that he was tortured.

Ahmad Fardan was released on bail from Dry Dock prison in the capital, Manama, at about 9pm on 9 January. Earlier that day he had been taken to the offices of the prison authorities to meet a member of the Special Investigative Unit (SIU), a unit within the Public Prosecutor’s Office (PPO) set up to investigate allegations of torture and other ill-treatment, killings and other violations by the security forces, who asked about his alleged torture and other ill-treatment since his arrest and told him that he was visiting because of this UA being issued on 7 January. Ahmad Fardan gave details of his torture to the investigator.

Ahmad Fardan gave an interview to the Bahraini newspaper *al-Wasat* on 11 January about the alleged torture and other ill-treatment he said he had been subjected to while he was being transferred to the Criminal Investigations Directorate (CID) in Manama in the vehicle of the security forces and on arrival at the CID.

On 26 December, the day of his arrest, he was taken before the Public Prosecution and interrogated on the charge of “participating in a public gathering” in connection with a 16 December demonstration in Abu Saiba’ village, west of Manama, which he had intended to cover as a photographer. During interrogation, he was kept blindfolded, with his hands cuffed behind his back. The Ministry of the Interior published a statement in English on 14 January denying that Ahmad Fardan had been tortured or sustained broken ribs, adding that he had been arrested in connection with his “involvement in a Molotov cocktail attack on police earlier in the month”. This is the first time Ahmad Fardan was told of this charge.

Please write immediately in Arabic, English or your own language:

- Calling on the authorities to drop the charges against Ahmad Fardan since they are related solely to his peaceful work as a photojournalist;
- Urging them to order a thorough, independent and impartial investigation into allegations that Ahmad Fardan was tortured or otherwise ill-treated when in the custody of the security forces;
- Urging them to uphold the rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly, including the freedom to seek, receive and impart information, in line with Bahrain’s international human rights obligations.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 27 FEBRUARY 2014 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 1766 4587 (keep trying)
Salutation: Your Majesty

Minister of Interior

Shaikh Rashid bin 'Abdullah Al Khalifa
Ministry of Interior
P.O. Box 13, al-Manama, Bahrain
Fax: +973 1723 2661
Twitter: @moi_Bahrain
Salutation: Your Excellency

And copies to:

Minister of Justice and Islamic Affairs
Shaikh Khalid bin Ali bin Abdullah Al Khalifa
Ministry of Justice and Islamic Affairs
P. O. Box 450, al-Manama, Bahrain
Fax: +973 1753 1284
Email: minister@justice.gov.bh
Twitter: @Khaled_Bin_Ali

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Please insert local diplomatic addresses below:

Name Address 1 Address 2 Address 3 Fax Fax number Email Email address Salutation Salutation

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date. This is the first update of UA 3/14. Further information:

<http://amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE11/002/2014/en>

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Ahmad Fardan, a photographer for the agencies Nur Photo, Demotix and Sipa, was arrested at 2.30am on 26 December 2013 during a raid on his home in Abu Saibah village, west of Manama. The arresting officers, in plain clothes, did not show an arrest warrant. He was slapped on the face, beaten and his penis was pulled during his transfer to the Criminal Investigations Directorate (CID) in Manama, and upon arrival at the CID. He had difficulty breathing, and passed out. He was taken to the Salmaniya Medical Complex where X-rays revealed he had sustained two broken ribs. After the examination, he was taken back to the CID for interrogation in relation to a demonstration on 16 December near his home. Fearing further torture he confessed to intending to participate in the demonstration and signed documents to that effect, which he could not read. He was then brought before the Public Prosecution for questioning without the presence of his lawyer. Afterwards, he was taken to al-Qal'a Prison hospital for a routine medical check before being transferred to Dry Dock prison in Manama. The prison authorities there were told to send him to al-Qal'a prison hospital, where he remained until 31 December. During this time he was only allowed to make two very short phone calls to his family to reassure them. The Public Prosecutor ordered on 1 January that he should be detained for 45 days pending further investigation, on a charge of "participating in a public gathering". He was then transferred to Dry Dock Prison in Manama where his family visited him for the first time on 5 January.

Before his release on 9 January, Ahmad Fardan was visited by a member of the SIU, which the government had set up on 27 February 2012 following recommendations in the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry (BICI) report. Its mandate is primarily to focus on the cases documented by the BICI report but it also examines other cases referred to it by the PPO. The BICI, appointed by Royal Order on 29 June 2011, was charged with investigating and reporting on human rights violations committed in connection with the 2011 protests. At the launch of the BICI report in November 2011, the government publicly committed itself to implementing its recommendations. The report recounted the government's response to the mass protests and documented wide-ranging human rights abuses. Among its key recommendations, the report called on the government to bring to account those responsible for human rights violations, including torture and excessive use of force, and carry out independent investigations into allegations of torture.

The establishment of BICI and its report was considered to be a groundbreaking initiative, but the promise of meaningful reform has been betrayed by the government's unwillingness to implement key recommendations around accountability; this includes its failure to carry out independent, effective and transparent investigations into allegations of torture and other ill-treatment and excessive use of force, and to prosecute all those who gave the orders to commit human rights abuses. For further information see the November 2012 report *Reform shelved, repression unleashed* (Index: MDE 11/062/2012), <http://amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE11/062/2012/en>.

Bahrain's parliament held an extraordinary session on 28 July 2013, after which it submitted 22 recommendations to the King, Shaikh Hamad Bin 'Issa Al Khalifa. The recommendations toughen punishments laid out in the 2006 anti-terrorism law. A few days later the King issued several decrees further curtailing the right to freedom of expression, including banning all protests, sit-ins and public gatherings in Manama indefinitely and giving the security forces additional sweeping powers.

A joint statement signed by 47 countries at the UN Human Rights Council on 9 September expressed serious concern about the ongoing human rights violations in Bahrain.

Name: Ahmad Fardan
Gender m/f: m

Further information on UA: 3/14 Index: MDE 11/005/2014 Issue Date: 16 January 2014