

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT

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## **Bahrain: Harassment and intimidation of main opposition continue unabated**

Amnesty International today called on the Bahraini authorities to fully uphold freedom of association and expression as the authorities moved to prosecute the largest opposition group on an array of offences.

On 17 February, the Ministry of Interior said that it referred the case of the political opposition group, Al-Wefaq National Islamic Society, to the Public Prosecution for “violations that amounted to crimes punishable by law”.

According to the Ministry of Interior, the referral is based on statements by Al-Wefaq on its twitter accounts and website which purportedly incited hatred against the government, and a foreign government. Al-Wefaq is also accused of spreading false news in a way that could harm civil peace and national security and calling for illegal rallies.

Al-Wefaq told Amnesty International that they have not yet received any notification or summons to appear before the Public Prosecution in relation to the Ministry of Interior’s accusations.

Al-Wefaq has been relentlessly targeted by the authorities since it decided, alongside other political opposition groups, to boycott the November 2014 elections. It has an ongoing case against it for alleged breaches of the Law on Political Associations filed in July 2014, although it submitted to the Ministry of Justice a report on the process and results of its General Assembly Meeting in December 2014.

After the elections, the authorities targeted the group’s leadership. Its Secretary General, Sheikh Ali Salman, has been charged with a number of offences, including inciting to overthrow the government by force, despite his repeated calls for peaceful protests. His arrest and detention on 28 December 2014 came a few days after he was re-elected as the head of Al-Wefaq. His trial before the High Criminal Court in Manama will resume on 25 February.

Another prominent leader of Al-Wefaq, Sayed Jamil Kadhem, was re-arrested again on 15 February from the court after an appeal judge upheld his six month prison sentence and a fine of 500 BHD (approx. 1,325 USD). He was convicted and sentenced on 13 January by the Lower Criminal Court in Manama after the High Electoral Committee, headed by the Minister of Justice, filed a complaint accusing him of undermining the electoral process. He was arrested on 14 January 2015 to serve his sentence before he was released on bail on the first hearing of his appeal trial on 1 February.

Sayed Jamil Kadhem, president of the Al-Wefaq Consultative (Shura) Council, was charged in

October 2014 under the 2002 Law on Exercising Political Rights with “violating freedom of the elections by disrupting and spreading false statements about them with a view to impacting their outcome” after he tweeted about “political money” offered to individuals to run as candidates in the November 2014 elections. He also tweeted calling for a boycott of the elections.

The targeting of Sheikh Ali Salman and Sayed Jamil Kadhem is a clear indication that the government is intent on muzzling the largest political opposition group which represents the Shi'a majority population. Amnesty International urges the Bahraini authorities to drop all charges against Al-Wefaq leaders as they have been arrested solely for expressing their views peacefully. The organization considers both of them to be prisoners of conscience and calls for their immediate and unconditional release.