

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

## PUBLIC STATEMENT

29 July 2015

Index: MDE 11/2186/2015

### **Bahraini authorities must respect human rights when investigating Sitra bombing**

Amnesty International has today called on the Bahraini authorities to ensure those arrested in connection to a recent bombing are not subjected to acts of torture and other ill-treatment while in custody.

The Public Security Chief of the Ministry of Interior stated that several individuals had been arrested in connection with a bombing in the village of Sitra, on an island south of the capital Manama, which killed two policemen and injured six others yesterday. The security forces have been heavily deployed in Sitra and have carried out a number of house raids and arrests since the bombing.

Amnesty International recognizes the Bahraini authorities' duty and responsibility to apprehend and bring to justice those responsible for the killing of the two policemen and injury of six others. However, the organization urges the authorities to ensure those arrested are not arbitrarily detained or placed at risk of torture and other ill-treatment and are given prompt access to a lawyer and family. If charged, they must be given a fair trial without recourse to the death penalty.

In many cases documented by Amnesty International, individuals arrested in connection to past explosions in Bahrain have often been tortured or otherwise ill-treated during their first days or weeks in the custody and interrogation at the Ministry of Interior's Criminal Investigations Directorate (CID). Many were then tried unfairly and convicted on the basis of "confessions" under torture. Scores have had their nationality revoked and several have been sentenced to death.

Many of those detained, for instance, in connection to an explosion in al-Daih village that killed three policemen on 3 March 2014, complained, including in court, that they were tortured during interrogation at the CID. Their lawyers were not able to meet with any of the defendants until the first session of the trial on 30 April 2014 despite repeated requests to do so ahead of the trial. The court also refused to grant lawyers full access to the evidence (video recording, pictures and witnesses) referred to in the prosecution documents, depriving them the right to equality of arms and preventing them from mounting an adequate defence or meaningfully cross-examining witnesses. In February 2015, the court sentenced three of the defendants to death and seven others to life imprisonment. All had their Bahraini nationality revoked.

Amnesty International is concerned that many of those being detained in relation to the

Sitra bombing may be denied access to their lawyers and families for at least 28 days, in accordance with 2014 amendments to the anti-terrorism law, though contrary to international human rights standards. This places them at risk of torture and other ill-treatment. The anti-terrorism law also empowers the detaining authorities to hold them for up to six months without any means to challenge the legality of their detention before a court of law or an independent body.

The bombing on Tuesday in Sitra is the second to take place in one month. On 19 July, a bomb exploded in West Ekar which injured one policeman on duty. In 2014, five policemen died following separate bomb blasts in the village of al-Dair in February, in al-Daih in March and in Damistan in December.

All major political opposition groups in Bahrain publicly condemned Tuesday's killings.

The Sitra bombing took place after the Ministry of Interior announced on 25 July that the security authorities had "foiled" an attempt to smuggle weapons into Bahrain and that one of two suspects arrested had "received military training in Iran" and was "given funds to assist the failed smuggling operation". The Chief of Public Security stated that these weapons contain the same substance as that used in the bombing.