

URGENT ACTION

CONVICTION UPHELD, PRISON SENTENCE EXTENDED

Opposition leader Sheikh 'Ali Salman's conviction was upheld and his prison sentence extended from four to nine years by the Court of Appeal in Manama on 30 May. He is a prisoner of conscience, held solely for his peaceful criticism of the Bahraini government.

On 30 May the Appeal Court in Manama, the capital of Bahrain, upheld opposition leader **Sheikh 'Ali Salman's** conviction and extended his prison sentence from four to nine years, thus reversing his earlier acquittal on the charge of "incitement to the promotion of the change of the political system by force, threats and other illegal means". His appeal had been pending for eight months and was marred by irregularities. Sheikh 'Ali Salman will be appealing his conviction before the Cassation Court.

Sheikh 'Ali Salman, the Secretary General of Bahrain's main opposition party, al-Wefaq National Islamic Society, was originally sentenced on 16 June 2015 by the High Criminal Court after an unfair trial to four years in prison on charges which included "publicly insulting the Interior Ministry" and "publicly inciting others to disobey the law". The court had acquitted him of "incitement to the promotion of the change of the political system by force, threats and other illegal means" which the Prosecution appealed. These charges relate to speeches he made in 2012 and 2014, including at his party's General Assembly in which he reaffirmed the party's determination to pursue power in Bahrain through peaceful means, to achieve the reform demands of the 2011 uprising, and to hold those responsible for human rights violations to account. He also stressed the need for equality for all Bahrainis.

In September 2015, the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention called on the Bahraini authorities to release Sheikh 'Ali Salman immediately and to grant him adequate compensation.

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

- Calling on the Bahraini authorities to quash Sheikh 'Ali Salman's conviction and to release him immediately and unconditionally, as he is a prisoner of conscience, held solely for peacefully exercising his right to freedom of expression;
- Calling on them to implement the decision of the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention immediately;
- Urging them to uphold the right to freedom of expression and repeal laws that criminalize the peaceful exercise of the rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 27 JULY 2016 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

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 Al Khalifa

Ministry of Justice and Islamic Affairs

P. O. Box 450, al-Manama

Bahrain

Fax: +973 1753 1284

Email via website:

<http://www.moj.gov.bh/en/>

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 fifth update of UA 22/15. Further information:

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde11/2882/2015/en/>

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Sheikh 'Ali Salman is the Secretary General of Bahrain's main opposition party, al-Wefaq National Islamic Society. He was arrested on 28 December 2014 in connection with statements he had made in speeches in 2012 and 2014, including his speech at the party's General Assembly meeting on 26 December in which he spoke about the opposition's continuing determination to reach power in Bahrain, to achieve the demands of the 2011 uprising through peaceful means and to hold those responsible for abuses to account. He also highlighted the need for equality for all Bahrainis, including the ruling family. His arrest took place a few days after he was re-elected for a fourth term as Secretary General of al-Wefaq. On 14 June 2016, the High Administrative Court ordered the suspension of al-Wefaq and the seizure of its assets following an urgent hearing.

Sheikh 'Ali Salman's trial before the High Criminal Court began on 28 January 2015 in the presence of Amnesty International observers and diplomats representing several foreign governments. The trial was adjourned several times. His lawyers have complained to the court that the evidence used against him consisted of excerpts of his speeches taken out of context, and asked the judge to play recordings of the speeches in full to the court. The judge repeatedly rejected this request as well as demands by the lawyers to call defence witnesses to testify in court. The judge arbitrarily interfered in the defence team's cross-examination of key witnesses, including of the officer who carried out the investigation into Sheikh 'Ali Salman, by objecting to their questions or rephrasing them. During the last trial session, the judge allowed the prosecution to submit additional pleading in writing but suspended the hearing after a few minutes without allowing the defence lawyers to submit further documents as evidence. Sheikh 'Ali Salman was sentenced on 16 June 2015, after an unfair trial, to two years in prison for "public incitement to loathing and contempt of a sect of people which will result in disrupting public order" and "publicly insulting the Interior Ministry", and to another two years in prison for "publicly inciting others to disobey the law", and acquitted of "incitement to the promotion of the change of the political system by force, threats and other illegal means".

Sheikh 'Ali Salman's appeal hearing opened before the Court of Appeal in Manama on 15 September 2015. The prosecution called for the maximum penalty and for his acquittal of "incitement to the promotion of the change of the political system by force, threats and other illegal means" to be reversed. During a prison visit ahead of the first session of the appeal, prison officers prevented Sheikh 'Ali Salman from discussing his case in private with his lawyers. During the second appeal hearing on 14 October, the judge denied his lawyers' request to play video recordings of Sheikh 'Ali Salman's speeches to demonstrate that excerpts used as evidence to sentence him were taken out of context, without giving any basis for this denial. His lawyers submitted their defence pleading in writing and then in court, but were interrupted throughout the hearing by the Public Prosecution. Sheikh 'Ali Salman was allowed to make a 15-minute statement to the court in which he denied all the allegations against him and said that he was seeking political and constitutional change through peaceful means and was being prosecuted for his beliefs.

Other political activists, exercising their right to freedom of expression, have been imprisoned by the Bahraini authorities. Ebrahim Sharif, former Secretary General of the National Democratic Action Society (Wa'ad) was imprisoned for one year on 24 February 2016 for calling for reform in a speech. Fadhel Abbas Mahdi Mohamed, former Secretary General of The Unitary National Democratic Assemblage (al-Wahdawi party) continues to appeal against a five-year sentence handed down to him after an unfair trial in June 2015 for a statement made by his political party condemning the Saudi Arabia-led airstrikes in Yemen. Amnesty International considers Ebrahim Sharif and Fadhel Abbas to be prisoners of conscience. These sentences and ongoing trials are examples of the Bahraini authorities' increasing intolerance of criticism and their desire to silence legitimate demands for reform and respect for human rights.

Name: Sheikh 'Ali Salman
Gender m/f: m

Further information on UA: 22/15 Index: MDE 11/4241/2016 Issue Date: 15 June 2016