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Bahrain: Woman Human Rights Defender tortured, including sexually assaulted, as Bahrain renews campaign to silence peaceful critics

Amnesty International has today called on the Bahraini authorities to immediately end the torture and other ill-treatment of human rights defenders and other critics of the government, and to investigate all allegations of torture and other ill-treatment with the intention to bring those responsible to justice through fair trials. The state must end all forms of reprisals it is currently using against human rights defenders and government critics, targeted solely for the peaceful exercise of their freedom of expression. This call comes after woman human rights defender Ebtisam al-Saegh described to Amnesty International the torture including the sexual assault she was subjected to for around seven hours on 26 May at the National Security Agency (NSA) building in Muharraq.

Amnesty International is gravely concerned that other peaceful critics and human rights defenders, summoned for interrogation by the NSA, are at high risk of torture and other ill-treatment.

Ebtisam al-Saegh told Amnesty International that she received a phone call on 25 May from the NSA who told her to present herself to the NSA building in Muharraq the following afternoon. When she arrived, she was immediately blindfolded, and in the subsequent hours, she was sexually assaulted, beaten all over her body, kicked in the stomach and kept standing for most of the seven hours she was being interrogated.

“They beat me on my nose and they kicked me in the stomach, knowing that I had undergone surgery on my nose and that I was suffering from my colon. I could hear an electric device next to me, which was to scare me. I was made to stand up for most of the time, except for ten minutes when they wanted to eat something. I fainted twice and was woken up with cold water thrown on me. They sat me on a chair only for a few seconds while still interrogating me. I was threatened that they would harm my family and that they would bring my husband and torture and electrocute him. The men told me ‘no one can protect you’. They took away my humanity, I was weak prey to them.”

During her interrogation, Ebtisam al-Saegh was questioned about Duraz, where [security forces attacked an ongoing protest on 23 May](#) killing five people, and about other human rights defenders she knew, as well as about her participation at the UN Human rights Council in Geneva last March, where she spoke out about violations in Bahrain. She was also told to stop all her human rights activities or she would be further targeted.

Ebtisam al-Saegh was released from the NSA at around 11pm in shock and unable to walk properly. She was transferred to hospital where she received treatment for a nervous breakdown.

There are reports of other human rights and political activists who were summoned to the NSA and may have also been tortured or otherwise ill-treated between 24 and 28 May. Some have since

Tweeted that they are stopping their activities.

The torture of human rights defenders, in this instance a woman, is a clear indication that the Bahraini government has stepped up its repression of peaceful critics and human rights defenders, moving from locking them up or banning them from travel, to now resorting to torture in order to force them to halt their activities.