

URGENT ACTION

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDER REMAINS IN DETENTION

Bahraini woman human rights defender Ebtisam al-Saegh was removed from solitary confinement following a two-day hunger strike in protest at her conditions of detention. She is a prisoner of conscience. The authorities have undertaken to carry out an investigation into her allegations of torture and sexual assault during her May detention.

On 15 August, human rights defender **Ebtisam al-Saegh** was removed from solitary confinement following a two-day second hunger strike in protest at being detained in solitary confinement in a cell usually reserved for very ill detainees at Isa Town Detention for women, in the Bahraini capital Manama. Ebtisam al-Saegh is now allowed daily calls to her family and weekly visits. She is also being taken for regular medical check-ups. On 24 August, the National Security Agency (NSA) Ombudsman informed her husband of his office's ongoing investigation in relation to her allegations of ill-treatment and sexual assault circulating in the media.

On 3 July, Ebtisam al-Saegh was arrested after tweeting about female detainees who were victims of abuse at Isa Town detention centre for women. She was interrogated at an undisclosed location outside the detention facilities, believed to be the NSA building in al-Muharraq, and later held in solitary confinement at the women prison. She had no access to her family or a lawyer during interrogation despite multiple requests. On 18 July, in the presence of a lawyer, the Terrorism Crimes Prosecution charged Ebtisam al-Saegh with "using human rights work as a cover to communicate and cooperate with Alkarama Foundation to provide them with information and fake news about the situation in Bahrain to undermine its status abroad". Ebtisam al-Saegh's detention was extended for a further six months pending completion of the investigation.

On 23 July, a forensic doctor diagnosed Ebtisam al-Saegh with fracture around her left hand and a broken rib dating back to her 26 May 2017 detention and torture, including sexual assault. Amnesty International believes that her arrest relates to her human rights work.

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

- Calling on the authorities to release Ebtisam al-Saegh immediately and unconditionally as she is a prisoner of conscience, detained solely for the peaceful exercise of her right to freedom of expression and her human rights work;
- Taking positive note of the NSA Ombudsman's investigation into Ebtisam al-Saegh's allegations of torture and sexual assault during her detention in May, and urging to conduct an impartial, independent and effective investigation; and ensure that those who are reasonably suspected of responsibility are prosecuted in proceedings which meet international standards of fair trial.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 12 OCTOBER 2017 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
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 third update of UA 165/17. Further information:

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde11/6770/2017/en/>

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Ebtisam al-Saegh, 48, is a Bahraini human rights defender who works with the Bahraini NGO Salam for Democracy and Human Rights (SALAM DHR). She was arrested on 3 July at 11:45pm after around 25 masked officers in plain clothes, who claimed to belong to the Criminal Investigation Directorate (CID), raided her house in Jid Ali, south of Manama. They did not present a warrant for her arrest. The officers confiscated her mobile phone and her national ID card and led her away. She was allowed to take her medication with her. She immediately began a hunger strike in protest at her arrest, her lack of access to her family and the fact that her lawyer was not allowed to attend her interrogation despite multiple requests. Earlier that day, Ebtisam al-Saegh had tweeted about the NSA's ill-treatment of women and the abuse of female detainees at Isa Town detention centre for women, and held the King of Bahrain responsible for their actions.

Ebtisam al-Saegh's interrogation took place at an undisclosed location outside the detention facilities. On 10 July in the evening, during interrogation, her health deteriorated. She suffered from irregular heartbeat (arrhythmia), numbness in the left hand, a drop in her blood sugar levels and blood pressure, and bloating of the stomach due to her irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) condition. She was taken for treatment to the Ministry of Interior hospital in al-Qalaa. Medical staff performed an electrocardiogram (ECG) and gave her intravenous fluids, including glucose, to raise her blood sugar levels, before discharging her. She was then again taken away for the continuation of her interrogation. Amnesty International understands that Ebtisam al-Saegh was interrogated by the authorities believed to be from the NSA for between 12 to 13 hours daily at an unknown location. After every interrogation session, she was held in solitary confinement at Isa Town detention centre for women. On 1 August, Ebtisam al-Saegh ended her hunger strike after receiving a family visit.

A few weeks earlier, on 26 May, NSA authorities had interrogated Ebtisam al-Saegh at their building in al-Muharraq. She told Amnesty International that when she arrived there, she alleged they immediately blindfolded her, and in the subsequent hours, sexually assaulted her, beat her all over her body, kicked her in the stomach and kept her standing for most of the seven hours she was being interrogated. During her interrogation, they questioned Ebtisam al-Saegh 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 in March, where she spoke out about violations in Bahrain. They also told her to stop all her human rights activities or else she would be further targeted. The NSA released Ebtisam al-Saegh from their building at around 11pm in a state of shock. She was transferred to hospital where she received treatment for a nervous breakdown. For further information, see Amnesty International's Public Statement: *Woman Human Rights Defender tortured and sexually assaulted as Bahrain renews campaign to silence peaceful critics*, 31 May 2017: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde11/6392/2017/en/>

Since June 2016, the Bahraini authorities have intensified their crackdown on perceived critics of the government. Dozens of human rights defenders and political activists were prevented and banned by the Bahraini authorities from travelling to Geneva, Switzerland, to take part in the United Nations Human Rights Council sessions. More recently, at the end of April, ahead of Bahrain's UN human rights review session in Geneva on 1 May, at least 32 perceived government critics were summoned for questioning by the Public Prosecution and the majority of them were charged with "illegal gathering in Duraz".

Alkarama Foundation is a non-governmental organisation based in Switzerland, defending individuals subjected to human rights violations in the Arab world. In November 2014, the United Arab Emirates published a list of organizations and groups it designated as terrorist, among them the Alkarama Foundation.

Name: Ebtisam al-Saegh

Gender m/f: f

Further information on UA: 165/17 Index: MDE 11/7014/2017 Issue Date: 31 August 2017