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Bahrain: Still paying a heavy price for freedom

Prisoners of conscience remain behind bars and activists continue to be jailed just for expressing their views whether via social media or on peaceful marches, two years on from 2011 protests, said Amnesty International in a [briefing](#) published today.

Victims of state repression say justice remains elusive and restrictions are still in place despite recent institutional reforms.

“The government of Bahrain cannot carry on imprisoning people simply because it can’t take criticism. It’s time that people detained simply for exercising their right to freedom of expression be released and for the harassment of other activists to desist,” said Hassiba Hadj Sahraoui, Amnesty International’s Middle East and North Africa Programme Deputy Director.

“Bahrain risks creating nothing more than a bureaucracy of human rights if changes are not matched by a genuine political will to reform - Bahrainis need to see their rights respected in everyday life.”

Last month, Amnesty International conducted a mission to Bahrain where it met with seven prisoners of conscience detained in Jaw prison. All of them reported they had been jailed on false charges or under laws that repress basic rights.

Mahdi’ Issa Mahdi Abu Deeb, a teacher’s trade union leader who has been in jail since his arrest in 2011 told Amnesty:

As for the charges against me and Jalila [Jalila al-Salman, a fellow teachers’ union leader and mother of three], no one thinks they are right: we did not call for the fall of the regime – we are people in the education system.

In a series of meetings with government officials, Amnesty International urged the authorities to release all prisoners of conscience, lift restrictions on freedom of expression, association and assembly and bring those who committed human rights abuses against protestors to justice.

“No convincing evidence had been submitted to justify these convictions. It appears that all of those involved were targeted for their anti-government views and for having participated in peaceful protests”.

Many of the prisoners of conscience were allegedly tortured in the first weeks of arrests.

Some complained about the medical treatment they are receiving. Hassan Mshaima’ said:

It is harassment as when I go to the hospital for treatment that last up to six hours, my face is covered and cannot see the doctor or the medical staff.

“Many of the allegations put forward by the prisoners of conscience have still not been investigated by

the authorities. The question remains whether the government will ensure justice is served and uphold the rights of the people.”