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## **Crackdown and hollow promises ahead of Bahrain Grand Prix**

As Bahrain steps into the global spotlight with the upcoming Formula One Grand Prix, there is a high risk that last year's repressive tactics – when a protester was killed by the security forces – will be repeated or even increased by the authorities, Amnesty International said today.

The intensity of protests is expected to top last year's demonstrations around the Grand Prix during a week of planned protests organized by political groups. Clashes between protesters and security forces have been reported in the past two weeks and human rights activists claim dozens of protesters have already been arrested ahead of this year's event.

“Instead of responding to the uprising of February 2011, the last two years have seen continued killings, arbitrary arrests and alleged torture in Bahrain. The authorities are trying to use the Grand Prix as a platform to show progress, with claims that the human rights situation has improved, whilst stepping up repression in order to ensure nothing disturbs their public image,” said Hassiba Hadj Sahraoui, Amnesty International's Middle East and North Africa Programme Deputy Director.

“We are seeing nothing but crackdowns and token gestures to clean up the country's image. Families wait for justice for their killed relatives, opposition leaders languish in jail, and children are detained and tried under the anti-terrorism law.”

The majority of protests are banned and forcibly dispersed, often with reckless use of tear gas.

Activists are also reporting that a number of arrests by plain-clothed security officers have been carried out since protests began two weeks ago, resulting in at least 50 detentions. Among them is Hussain Abdul Amir, who was taken from his home at 2am in Dar Kulaib on 3 April. His family received news on 12 April that he is being held at Dry Dock Prison.

“The Bahraini government says the country is engaged in human rights reform. The onus is on them to demonstrate it. They should immediately release all prisoners of conscience, let demonstrators exercise their rights peacefully and allow unrestricted access to NGOs and journalists to monitor the situation around the Grand Prix.”

### **Additional Information:**

- Of 96 official investigations of deaths in custody and during protests since 2011, 46 cases have been dismissed due to lack of evidence of a crime, or because the death was considered to have been caused by ‘an act of legitimate self defense’.
- When the cases were dismissed, most of the victims' families were not even told, nor were they given any adequate explanation of why the cases had been dismissed or details of the

- investigations. They have also not been told whether they can appeal against the decisions.
- Two people died this February during demonstrations marking the second anniversary of the uprising after being shot by riot police.
  - On 14 April, the Ministry of Interior reported that protesters caused a car explosion using a gas cylinder – Bahraini media and activists claim this is the third in a series of similar incidents. So far, no casualties have been documented.
  - Al Wefaq National Islamic Society, the main opposition bloc, announced a week of protests on 11 April under the slogan ‘democracy is our right’. On 14 April, hundreds of people peacefully took to the streets as part of a series of week-long rallies. More demonstrations are scheduled for the rest of this week.
  - The family of the 36-year-old protester, Salah Abbas Habib Ahmad Mousa, shot dead by security forces during last year’s protests, only heard last week about what steps are being taken to bring the perpetrator to account. In a move to deflect criticism, a low-ranking policeman was charged with his killing on 8 April 2013; a hearing is due to begin on 6 May. The victim’s family and their lawyer have been denied access to the investigation.