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Cancelled UN visit shows Bahrain 'not serious' about human rights

Bahrain is clearly "not serious" about implementing human rights reforms, Amnesty International said today after the Gulf kingdom cancelled a planned visit by the United Nations' torture expert for a second time.

The UN Special Rapporteur on torture, Juan Mendez, said he was "deeply disappointed" after Bahrain postponed next month's visit, citing delays in "ongoing national dialogue".

The Bahraini authorities also cancelled a visit by Juan Mendez in February 2012, claiming they were "still undergoing major reforms".

"This latest cancellation shows that Bahrain is clearly not serious about implementing human rights reforms. The authorities have used the buzzword of 'reform' as a smoke screen, when in reality they are not reforming," said Hassiba Hadj Sahraoui Amnesty International's Middle East and North Africa Deputy Director.

"There are no reforms in Bahrain, but rather human rights abuses continuing unabated."

The postponement comes amid continued clashes between protesters and security forces, which increased in the run-up to last weekend's controversial Formula One Grand Prix.

"This is the second time my visit has been postponed at very short notice. The authorities seem to view my visit as an obstacle rather than a positive factor to the reform process," said Mendez.

The independent torture expert had previously urged Bahrain to honour commitments it made to the UN's Universal Periodic Review process in September 2012.

These included releasing people jailed for exercising their right to freedom of expression, and investigating allegations of torture and other ill-treatment of those detained after anti-government protests.

Amnesty International continues to call for true justice and accountability in Bahrain.

"The Bahraini government must immediately release all prisoners of conscience and conduct independent, effective and transparent investigations into allegations of torture," said Hassiba Hadj Sahraoui.

"It must also bring to justice anyone at any level of the chain of command who committed or gave the orders to commit abuses; and refrain from further use of unnecessary or excessive force against protesters.

"Bahrain's allies have been far too keen to rely on the facade of reform and to go on with business as usual. The cancellation of the visit means there is no pretending anymore."

At the last session of the UN Human Rights Council, 43 states criticized ongoing human rights violations in Bahrain.