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Bahrain urged to free prisoners of conscience as appeals approach

On 24 July, a court will consider the appeal of human rights activist Nabeel Rajab against his three-month prison sentence on libel charges related to a post he made on Twitter. His appeal hearing was postponed on 18 July.

In another case a group of nine health professionals, whose convictions were upheld on appeal in June for their role in anti-government protests last year, have been summoned to appear before the Court of Cassation in the capital Manama on 30 July.

Amnesty International has previously adopted Nabeel Rajab as a prisoner of conscience and said that if any of the nine health professionals currently released on bail were jailed they would be prisoners of conscience, held solely for peacefully exercising their right to freedom of expression.

“The charade of justice has gone on too long in Bahrain, and all prisoners of conscience must be set free immediately and unconditionally before these appeals take place,” said Hassiba Hadj Sahraoui, Amnesty International’s Middle East and North Africa Deputy Programme Director.

“All convictions against them should be quashed.”

Nabeel Rajab

The charges against Nabeel Rajab, the President of the Bahrain Centre for Human Rights and Director of the Gulf Centre for Human Rights, relate to a tweet he posted on 2 June about Bahraini Prime Minister, Shaikh Khalifa Bin Salman Al Khalifa during his official visit to the area of al-Muharraq.

On 6 June, he was arrested after several al-Muharraq residents complained about the tweet. He was charged with libel on 14 June and released on bail on 27 June.

Following a court hearing on 9 July, he was re-arrested and jailed in Manama’s al-Jaw prison.

Salmaniya medical workers

Nine workers from Manama’s Salmaniya medical complex have been summoned to appear before the Court of Cassation on 30 July.

On 14 June, Manama’s High Criminal Court of Appeal upheld convictions against them on charges which include “calling for the overthrow of the regime by force”, “illegal gathering” and “instigating hatred against another sect” – many of them were quite vocal in denouncing the excessive use of force against protesters to international media. Amnesty International believes they did not use or advocated violence.

Their sentences ranged from one month to five years in prison, but five of the defendants have already spent their entire prison sentence behind bars. Nine other medical workers on trial with them were previously acquitted.

If the remaining four medical workers – Ali ‘Esa Mansoor al-‘Ekr, Ebrahim ‘Abdullah Ebrahim, Ghassan Ahmed ‘Ali Dhaif, and Sa’eed Mothaher Habib Al Samahiji – or any other in the group are jailed, Amnesty International would consider them to be prisoners of conscience.

Opposition activists

Amnesty International is also concerned about a judge’s recent decision to move all future hearings of 13 prominent Bahraini opposition activists behind closed doors, where they would be filmed.

In response to the move, the 13 men – who maintain their innocence and are also prisoners of conscience behind bars for peaceful political activities since last year – have asked their lawyers not to represent them in court any longer. The court has since appointed them new lawyers.

Several of the defendants have spoken out in previous court hearings to describe their alleged torture and other ill-treatment in detention, which included sexual assault and other acts of torture to coerce “confessions”.

They are serving prison terms ranging from two years to life imprisonment on bogus charges related to their participation in pro-reform protests in early 2011.

“In the first place they should not be tried for exercising their rights, yet not only are they tried but the trial has been moved behind closed doors in an apparent attempt to conceal the truth,” said Hassiba Hadj Sahraoui.

Amnesty International continues to call for the immediate and unconditional release of all prisoners of conscience in Bahrain, and urges the Bahraini authorities to carry out an independent investigation into all allegations of torture in detention and to

bring those responsible to justice in fair trials.
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