

URGENT ACTION

AROUND 250 INDIVIDUALS AT RISK OF TORTURE

Around 250 individuals in Bahrain are believed to have been detained as part of a clampdown against Shi'a political opposition and activism ahead of parliamentary elections on 23 October.

Since the arrest of 23 Shi'a political and human rights activists in August, the government has arrested what Bahraini activists estimate to be a further 230 individuals, all of them said to be Shi'a, in connection with anti-government demonstrations and riots held in Shi'a towns and villages. Official figures have not been made public. During these events some demonstrators set fire to tyres and threw Molotov cocktails at security forces.

During the first few weeks all detainees were held incommunicado; however, some have now been allowed visits by family members. Some in the first group of 23 detainees have seen their lawyers only once, when they were brought to the Public Prosecutor several weeks ago, but were not allowed to talk to them. The rest of the detainees have had no access to lawyers at all. This denial of contact exacerbates the risk of possible torture and other ill-treatment and the families and lawyers of some of the 23 men arrested in August have alleged that the detainees have been tortured. The government has denied this and has prohibited the publication of any information on the cases of the around 250 detainees. The ban is enforceable with a penalty of up to one year's imprisonment.. Human Rights Watch requested access to some of the detainees, but the authorities have rejected these in the past few days.

Since the first arrests took place, the Bahraini authorities have arbitrarily restricted the activities of a number of human rights activists and organizations. In September the Bahraini government suspended the board of the legally registered Bahrain Human Rights Society (BHRS), accusing it of "legal and administrative irregularities" and co-operating with "illegal organizations", after it had publicly criticized the government for violating the human rights of the 23 people arrested in August. An official from the Ministry of Social Development has been appointed as a temporary administrator. In recent weeks three human rights activists were temporarily prevented from travelling abroad to attend meetings and workshops on human rights, among other things, but were later told they could travel without restriction.

PLEASE WRITE IMMEDIATELY in Arabic or English:

- Urging the Bahraini authorities to allow detainees regular access to their lawyers in private and to their families;
- Calling on the Bahraini authorities to carry out a prompt and thorough independent investigation into the allegations of torture and other ill-treatment made by the families and lawyers on behalf of some of the detainees;
- Urging that any officials or others found responsible for torturing or otherwise ill-treating detainees be brought to justice in line with international human rights law;
- Urging the Bahraini government to lift all arbitrary restrictions on human rights organizations and activists in Bahrain.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 19th NOVEMBER 2010 TO:

Shaikh Khalifa bin Salman Al
Khalifa
Prime Minister
Office of the Prime Minister
P.O. Box 1000, al-Manama, Bahrain
Fax: +973 17533033
Salutation: Your Highness

Shaikh Khalid bin Ahmed Bin
Mohamed Al Khalifa
Minister of Foreign Affairs
Ministry of Foreign Affairs
P.O. Box 547, al-Manama, Bahrain
Fax: +973 17212603
Salutation: Your Excellency

Shaikh Khaled bin Ali Al Khalifa
Minister of Justice and Islamic
Affairs
Ministry of Justice and Islamic
Affairs
P. O. Box 450, al-Manama, Bahrain
Fax: +973 17536343
Salutation: Your Excellency

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives of Bahrain accredited to your country. Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date. This is the first update of UA 195/10 MDE 11/005/2010. Further information:

<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE11/005/2010/en>

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Bahrain is a constitutional monarchy headed by the King, Sheikh Hamad bin Issa Al Khalifa. The head of government is the Prime Minister, Sheikh Khalifa bin Salman Al Khalifa. He presides over a cabinet of 20 members, 80 per cent of whom belong to the Sunni Muslim royal family.

Bahrain has two legislative bodies: the Chamber of Deputies, elected by popular vote and the Shura Council, appointed by the King. In 2006 parliamentary elections for the Chamber of Deputies took place, with the opposition Shi'a Islamist group, al Wifaq, winning 17 out of 40 seats in a new chamber dominated by Shi'a and Sunni Islamist groups. The 2006 elections took place amid reports of human rights violations.

Since 2006, riots against the government have taken place in predominantly Shi'a villages. Police are alleged to have used excessive force on some occasions in the context of these riots and other disturbances.

The next parliamentary elections are scheduled to take place on 23 October 2010.

Further information on UA 195/10 MDE 11/005/2010 Issue Date: 8 October 2010

