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Bahrain: Promising Human rights reform must continue

At the conclusion of a mission to Bahrain, Amnesty International said today it was privileged to visit the country during a truly historic period for human rights.

The last two months have seen extraordinary developments in the human rights field, including the release of all political prisoners and detainees, the abolition of the 1974 Decree on State Security Measures and the State Security Court, and the return of many Bahraini citizens after years in forced exile abroad.

Just a few weeks ago the people of Bahrain voted overwhelmingly in favour of the National Charter, referred by the Amir to popular referendum.

"The challenge now facing the government and the people of Bahrain is how to translate the human rights principles contained in the National Charter into every day practice", Amnesty international said.

Led by law Professor Bartam Brown, and including June Ray and Dr. Said Boumedouha, Director and Researcher , respectively, at Amnesty International's Middle East Program, the delegation has held four days of meetings with officials and members of civil society.

They participated in talks with His Highness the Amir, Shaikh Hamad bin Issa Al Khalifa, the Crown Prince Shaikh Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa, and with Ministers and high ranking officials in the Ministries of Interior, Justice, Labour and Social affairs, Foreign Affairs and Education, as well as the Human Rights Committee of Majlis al Shura (Consultative Council).

The delegation also met with Bahraini associations, including journalists, lawyers, women, workers and the newly formed human rights society. In addition, the delegates held meetings with released prisoners of conscience and some of those who recently returned to the country after years of forcible exile abroad. All of them expressed great enthusiasm for the on-going human rights reforms.

"This process of reform will only be complete when the current laws of Bahrain are reformed and implemented to fully reflect internationally accepted standards for human rights, in order to ensure these rights for the future", Amnesty International said.

Amnesty International discussed future cooperation in human rights education as well as promotion and training with the government and associations.

" Legislative changes are needed now in this delicate phase of transition", said Professor Brown, " We have suggested to the government of Bahrain some of the legal provisions which should be prioritized as being in urgent need of review to bring Bahrain's legislation into compliance with international human rights standards".

These include the Criminal Procedure Code, provisions of the Penal Code and the 1989 law on non-governmental associations.

"In the coming period world attention will focus on Bahrain's moves to give substance to the human rights principles contained in the National Charter and to set an example in establishing a culture of human rights in the region", Professor Brown concluded.

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