AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT

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BAHRAIN: JOINT STATEMENT: SHIA CLERICS FACE MASS TRIAL MARRED BY TORTURE ALLEGATIONS AND GRAVE FAIR TRIAL VIOLATIONS

We, the undersigned human rights groups, express deep concern over the mass trial primarily targeting Shia clerics, which has been marred by serious allegations of torture and other ill-treatment, coerced confessions and severe due process violations including incommunicado detention and secret proceedings.

On 8 November 2026, Bahrain's High Criminal Court is expected to deliver its judgment on several terrorism-related charges including establishing "a terrorist group" to overthrow the "constitutional regime" and promote Iran's "Guardianship of the Islamic Jurist" *(wilayat al-faqih)* by controlling mosques and local religious gatherings.

The proceedings involve 69 defendants, including 60 Shia clerics and nine affiliates. Of the 56 defendants in custody, 47 are clerics and nine are affiliates, including religious reciters, known as *radoods*. The remaining 13 clerics are being tried in absentia.

We call on the Bahraini authorities to ensure that the proceedings comply with international fair trial standards, including the right to an effective defence, independently investigate the allegations of torture and other ill-treatment, and to exclude from evidence any confessions obtained through torture or ill-treatment.

This mass prosecution raises serious concerns about religious persecution targeting the religious life and leadership of Bahrain's Shia community.

The targeted clerics are Shia religious scholars, imams and teachers, including respected figures who lead major congregations and provide religious guidance to their communities. Sheikh Mohammed Sanqour and Sheikh Ali Al-Sadadi led Friday prayers at the Imam Al-Sadiq Grand Mosque in Duraz, which hosts Bahrain's largest Shia Friday congregation. Sayed Moosa Al-Alwedaie served as imam at the Grand Mosque in Ras Al-Ro'maan. Their removal from their congregations, alongside the detention of other prominent scholars, disrupts religious leadership, teaching and communal worship, and sends an intimidating message to the wider Shia community.

The Bahrain Institute for Rights and Democracy (BIRD) has obtained firsthand accounts from the detainees alleging abuses that may amount to torture. A concerning pattern has emerged, as some defendants were held incommunicado at undisclosed locations; some were prevented from revealing their whereabouts even when family calls were allowed. These accounts echo the UN Committee against Torture's (CAT) January 2026 concerns about incommunicado detention and the lack safeguards for terrorism suspects in Bahrain.

The defendants were initially detained at the Criminal Investigation Directorate (CID), where they reported being subjected to forced standing, prolonged blindfolding and handcuffing, sleep deprivation, threats of physical and sexual violence against themselves and their families, citizenship revocation and deportation. Some were threatened with "the same fate as Sayed Mohamed Al-Mousawi", who was tortured to death in state custody.

The authorities have accused those detained of operating an unlawful organisation and engaging in terrorist financing, through official Instagram statements, while one of the detainees is charged with espionage.

However, some of the evidence brought forward included the use of religious teaching, books, *khums (*religious tax in the Shia faith), charitable funds and foreign religious contacts as criminal evidence risks conflating religious identity, political allegiance and individual criminal responsibility.

Defence lawyers have been denied meaningful access to the evidence. According to information shared with BIRD, they were prevented from obtaining copies of the case files and had to rely on handwritten notes they made while reviewing the files under severe time constraints. The defendants were divided into four groups. Those in custody were required to participate by video link, after the judge denied requests for them to appear before the court.

According to BIRD, many defendants described brief Public Prosecution interviews followed by intense pressure to sign lengthy statements they were not permitted to read, under threats of being returned to the CID for further abuse. Defendants subsequently denied questions and answers attributed to them; identical passages appear across different defendants' purported confessions. When defense lawyers requested recordings of interrogations to test these accounts, they were met with claims that the footage had been deleted after one month. The UN Committee against Torture (CAT) has already called for interrogations in all places of custody to take place in rooms equipped with video or audio surveillance.

BIRD's review of a memoranda issued by the Special Investigation Unit (SIU) -which falls under the authority of the Public Prosecution and is mandated with investigating torture allegations- raises grave concerns that the SIU did not thoroughly investigate torture allegations, shielding suspected perpetrators and lending credibility to potentially coerced confessions.

BIRD ALSO DOCUMENTED THE FOLLOWING CASES:

Sayed Moosa Jawad Alwedaie, 57, told SIU investigators that he had been threatened at CID "with raping his daughter, putting slippers in his mouth, assaulting him, beating him, torturing him with electricity, removing his clothes and leaving him naked", as well as "his deportation and the deportation of his family", according to an SIU memorandum reviewed by BIRD.

Despite these grave allegations, the SIU dismissed the complaint for lack of evidence. Crucially, it failed to secure potentially vital CCTV footage, claiming that "the recording device automatically deleted the recordings after one month had passed". Instead of investigating why the footage had not been preserved or whether other evidence could be obtained, the SIU relied on the absence of evidence to dismiss serious allegations of torture andother ill-treatment.

The case of Sheikh Mohammed Saeed Al-Taitoon, 62, illustrates these concerns. He reported being blindfolded and restrained for a week, forced to stand despite severe urinary bleeding and kidney stones, denied necessary surgery, and threatened with the revocation of his family's citizenship.

The SIU's own records documented the complainant's psychological deterioration, corroborated by a fellow detainee and a medical assessment identifying "depression and anxiety symptoms" and "poor concentration." Yet the SIU dismissed the allegations as "unsubstantiated".

The SIU-appointed psychiatrist acknowledged these symptoms but suggested they could be explained by difficulties adjusting to detention, rather than necessarily resulting from alleged torture. Instead of investigating the abuse, the SIU relied on the absence of a definitive causal link to dismiss the complaint, without demonstrating any serious effort to examine CCTV footage or other evidence that could establish such a link.

Both cases demonstrate why CAT's recommendations require practical implementation, such as independent investigation, scrutiny of interrogation recordings, effective medical care and examination of disputed confessions before they are used to convict.

We therefore call on the Bahraini authorities to:

- Guarantee fair trials for all defendants, including full access to evidence, adequate time and facilities for defence preparation and independent trial monitoring.
- Exclude coerced confessions and ensure no conviction relies on evidence obtained through torture and other ill-treatment.
- Immediately release those arbitrarily detained and drop charges based on peaceful religious activities.
- Promptly, thoroughly, independently, impartially, transparently and effectively investigate allegations of torture and other ill-treatment, enforced disappearance and cases of coerced confessions.
- Hold suspected perpetrators accountable, including security officials, prosecutors and others implicated in torture, coercion or the cover-up of abuses.
- Ensure access of victims to justice and effective remedies.

Signatories:

1. Bahrain Institute for Rights and Democracy (BIRD)
2. Al Amal Center for Human Rights and Justice
3. ALQST for Human Rights
4. Americans for Democracy & Human Rights in Bahrain (ADHRB)
5. Amnesty International
6. Bahrain Centre for Human Rights (BCHR)
7. CIVICUS
8. DAWN
9. FairSquare
10. Global Voices
11. Human Rights First
12. Human Rights Watch
13. IFEX
14. International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH)
15. International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims (IRCT)
16. MENA Rights Group
17. The Advocates for Human Rights
18. The European Centre for Democracy & Human Rights (ECDHR)
19. The Free Al-Khawaja Campaign
20. The World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT)