

URGENT ACTION

DROP CHARGES AGAINST LEADING OPPOSITION FIGURE
A leading opposition figure in Bahrain was denied bail in a first court hearing attended by an Amnesty International delegation. He will remain in custody until 25 February. Amnesty International is calling for charges to be dropped and for his immediate release.

The trial of **Sheikh 'Ali Salman**, Secretary General of the main opposition group in Bahrain, al-Wefaq National Islamic Society, started on 28 January before the High Criminal Court in Manama, the capital of Bahrain. An Amnesty International delegation attended Sheikh 'Ali Salman's first hearing, together with representatives of the UK and US embassies, amongst others. He pleaded not guilty. Requests by his lawyers to release him on bail were rejected and the court ruled he should remain in custody until the next hearing on 25 February.

He was arrested on 28 December following interrogation at the Ministry of Interior's Criminal Investigations Directorate in connection with statements made in speeches in 2012 and 2014. Sheikh 'Ali Salman was charged with "incitement to promote the change of the political system by force, threats and other illegal means", "public incitement to loathing and contempt of a sect of people which will result in disrupting public disorder", "publicly inciting others to disobey the law" and "publicly insulting the Interior Ministry".

Some of these charges seem to stem from statements made during his speech at the party's General Assembly meeting on 26 December when he referred to the refusal of the opposition in Bahrain to follow the approach of the Syrian opposition and turn the country into a military battleground. In the same speech, he spoke about the opposition's continuing determination to reach power in Bahrain, to achieve the demands of the 2011 uprising through peaceful means and to hold those responsible for abuses to account. He also highlighted the need for equality for all Bahrainis, including with the ruling family.

Please write immediately in English or Arabic:

- Calling on the Bahraini authorities to release Sheikh 'Ali Salman immediately and unconditionally and to drop the charges against him, as he is a prisoner of conscience, held solely for peacefully exercising his right to freedom of expression;
- Urging them to uphold the right to freedom of expression and repeal laws that criminalize the peaceful exercise of the rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 11 MARCH 2015 TO:

King
 Shaikh Hamad bin 'Issa Al Khalifa
 Office of His Majesty the King
 P.O. Box 555
 Rifa'a Palace, al-Manama
 Bahrain
 Fax: +973 1766 4587
Salutation: Your Majesty

Minister of Interior
 Shaikh Rashid bin 'Abdullah Al Khalifa
 Ministry of Interior
 P.O. Box 13, al-Manama
 Bahrain
 Fax: +973 1723 2661
 Twitter: @moi_Bahrain
Salutation: Your Excellency

And copies to:
Minister of Justice and Islamic Affairs
 Shaikh Khalid bin Ali Al Khalifa
 Ministry of Justice and Islamic Affairs
 P. O. Box 450, al-Manama
 Bahrain
 Fax: +973 1753 1284
 Email via website:
<http://www.moj.gov.bh/en/>
 Twitter: @Khaled_Bin_Ali

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Please insert local diplomatic addresses below:

Name Address 1 Address 2 Address 3 Fax Fax number Email Email address Salutation Salutation

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

**AMNESTY
 INTERNATIONAL**



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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The charges against Sheikh 'Ali Salman and the trial of other outspoken activists as a result of their peaceful exercise of the right to freedom of expression highlight the Bahraini authorities' increasing intolerance to criticism and their aim to silence legitimate demands for reform and for the respect of human rights.

Following Sheikh 'Ali Salman's arrest, a number of demonstrations took place in a number of towns and villages in protest and have continued since. In a familiar pattern, security forces used tear gas and shotgun to disperse the crowds. The authorities have also reportedly refused to grant permission for people to demonstrate, denying them the rights to peaceful assembly. 'Ali Salman's arrest came a few days after he was re-elected for a fourth term as Secretary General of al-Wefaq.

In October 2014, a court ordered the party to suspend all activities for three months, but the Minister of Justice, who filed the case on the basis of alleged irregularities, ordered a delay in the implementation of the court decision until after the party's general assembly meeting. Al-Wefaq boycotted the parliamentary elections held in November 2014, together with other opposition political parties.

Name: Sheikh 'Ali Salman

Gender m/f: m

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