

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

PUBLIC STATEMENT

25 September 2012
Index: MDE 11/055/2012

Bahrain must protect human rights activists from reprisals

Amnesty International has called today on the Bahraini authorities to ensure the safety of civil society members who participated at the 21st session of the United Nations Human Rights Council in Geneva after they received threats of reprisals for their participation in the meeting.

Mohammed al-Maskati, the president of the Bahrain Youth Society for Human Rights, has said he was subjected to intimidation before and after delivering a statement to the Human Rights Council in Geneva on 13 September, when he participated in a panel discussion on intimidation and reprisals against persons and organizations who co-operate with the UN. He told Amnesty International that from the date of his arrival in Geneva until after he delivered the speech he received more than a dozen anonymous phone calls in which the callers branded him a “traitor to his country” and an “agent of Iran” and allegedly threatened to kill him upon his return to Bahrain.

On 23 September, the Bahraini newspaper *Al Watan*, believed to have close links with the authorities, published an article entitled “List of participants defaming Bahrain in Geneva”, which included names, photographs and other details of Bahraini civil society activists who had travelled to the Human Rights Council session in Geneva. The newspaper had previously quoted members of the Shura Council, the upper house and main legislative body, saying that “whoever tarnishes the image of the country is a traitor who does not deserve [Bahraini] nationality” and appealed for such persons to be held responsible for defaming the country.

On 24 September, *Al Watan* reported that some lawyers in Bahrain had called for defamation of Bahrain abroad to be a crime punishable by law and alleged that speeches by Bahraini civil society activists denouncing human rights abuses in Geneva were based on fabricated information.

The publication of the *Al Watan* articles followed statements, delivered in Geneva on 19 September, by several Bahraini civil society activists on the occasion of the Human Rights Council’s consideration of the outcome of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) for Bahrain. The activists had also participated in parallel events denouncing human rights violations in Bahrain.

Last month, the UN Secretary-General submitted a report on reprisals against individuals who had co-operated with the UN in the field of human rights. The report makes reference to Bahrain and highlights the alleged intimidation of and reprisals against human rights defenders who participated in the UPR examination of Bahrain on 21 May 2012. It also notes the fact that two Bahraini newspapers, *Al Watan* and *Gulf Daily News* had labelled human rights activists who collaborated with the UN in the framework of the UPR as “traitors” or “a disloyal bunch” and accused them of wanting to “tarnish the reputation of Bahrain”.

During a meeting with the Bahraini State Minister for Human Rights on 20 September, Amnesty International raised concerns about the threats Mohammad al-Maskati reported he had received in connection with his activities at the Human Rights Council. Amnesty International emphasized the responsibility of the government of Bahrain to ensure the safety of Mohammad al-Maskati and

other human rights defenders in Bahrain. The Minister asked Amnesty International to encourage human rights activists who received threats to file a complaint with the Bahraini Public Prosecutor.

Amnesty International is concerned that Mohammad al-Maskati and other members of Bahraini civil society who participated in the UPR exercise are being targeted on account of the peaceful and legitimate exercise of their right to freedom of expression and their role in exposing evidence of human rights violations. The UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders states in Article 12 (2):

“The State shall take all necessary measures to ensure the protection by the competent authorities of everyone, individually and in association with others, against any violence, threats, retaliation, de facto or *de jure* adverse discrimination, pressure or any other arbitrary action as a consequence of his or her legitimate exercise of the rights referred to in the present Declaration.”