

URGENT ACTION

BAHRAINI POET SENTENCED FOR READING A POEM

On 12 June a Bahraini poet and student was sentenced to one year in prison for reading a poem criticizing the king of Bahrain.

Ayat al-Qarmezhi, a poet and university student at the Faculty of Teachers in Bahrain, was sentenced on 12 June by the National Safety Court of First Instance – a military court – in Bahrain to one year in prison for taking part in illegal protests, disrupting public security and inciting hatred towards the regime.

Ayat al-Qarmezhi's family told Amnesty International that she appeared strong after the trial and that her lawyer plans to appeal the decision. Ayat al-Qarmezhi was held incommunicado for the first 15 days of her detention and she alleges that she was beaten and tortured with electric shocks while held in detention. She had three court sessions while on trial, and she has only been allowed to see her family after each session.

In February, while attending a pro-reform rally in Manama, Ayat al-Qarmezhi read out a poem written by her which she said was addressed to the King of Bahrain. Its lyrics include the lines "We are the people who will kill humiliation and assassinate misery / Don't you hear their cries, don't you hear their screams?"

Ayat al-Qarmezhi was forced to turn herself over to the authorities on 30 March after masked members of the security forces raided her parents' house on at least two occasions and reportedly threatened to kill her brothers unless she did so.

Amnesty international considers that she has been imprisoned merely for peacefully expressing her views in public and that she is therefore a prisoner of conscience and should be immediately and unconditionally released, as well as having the charges against her dropped.

PLEASE WRITE IMMEDIATELY in English or Arabic:

- Urging the authorities to release Ayat al-Qarmezhi immediately and unconditionally, as well as dropping the charges against her, since Amnesty International considers that she has been imprisoned merely for peacefully expressing her views in public and is therefore a prisoner of conscience;
- Urging the authorities to immediately set up a full, independent and impartial investigation into her allegations of torture or other ill-treatment, to make its results public, and to bring to justice anyone responsible for such acts;
- Ensuring that Ayat al-Qarmezhi is permitted immediate and regular access to her lawyer and relatives, and any medical treatment she may require;
- Urging the authorities to respect and uphold the rights to freedom expression, movement and assembly in Bahrain, including the right to peaceful protest.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 18 JULY 2011 TO:

King

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

Salutation: Your Majesty

Minister of Justice and Islamic Affairs

Shaikh Khaled bin Ali Al Khalifa
Ministry of Justice and Islamic Affairs
P. O. Box 450, Manama, Bahrain
Fax: +973 17531284

Salutation: Your Excellency

Commander-in-Chief of the Bahrain Defence Force

Marshal Shaikh Khalifa bin Ahmed Al Khalifa
Bahrain Defence Force
Riffa Road, Manama, Bahrain
e-mail: dgcbdf@gmail.com
Fax: +973 17663923

Salutation: Your Excellency

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**



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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

At least 500 people have been detained in relation to the pro-reform protests which began in February and four have died in custody in suspicious circumstances. Dozens of those detained have been brought to trial before military courts, which have convicted a number of defendants, handing down sentences ranging from short prison terms to, in two cases so far, the death penalty. A state of emergency imposed by the Bahraini authorities on 15 March – known as the State of National Safety – was lifted on 1 June.

Ayat al-Qarmezhi was tried and sentenced by the National Safety Court of First Instance, which is a military court whose three judges include one military judge and two civilian judges. Amnesty International considers that military courts should never be used to try civilians and that such trials directly infringe international standards of fair trial. Appeals from the court are heard by another military court, the First Safety Court of Appeal; this has already upheld two death sentences in another trial.

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