

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT

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## **Kuwait: Respect freedom of expression and assembly for Bidun**

The authorities in Kuwait must allow the community of stateless individuals known as Bidun to peacefully exercise their right to freedom of expression, association and assembly, in line with international human rights standards.

On 12 July 2012 the Ministry of the Interior issued another warning for “illegal residents” in Kuwait not to demonstrate. This follows a peaceful protest by some of the Bidun on 5 July 2012 that Kuwaiti security forces broke up using water canons, tear gas and beatings. Eleven Bidun were arrested and are believed to remain in custody.

Bidun in Kuwait have been protesting regularly after Friday’s prayer in Freedom Square in Taima’ in the Governorate of Jahra, north western Kuwait against their continuing statelessness and to demand Kuwaiti nationality, which would allow them to access free education, free health care and employment opportunities on the same basis as Kuwaiti citizens. The Kuwaiti authorities consider many of them to be illegal residents.

Kuwaiti law prohibits non-Kuwaiti nationals from holding demonstrations.

Amnesty International said that the fact that a peaceful protest has not been granted an official permit did not justify arbitrary arrest or the unnecessary or disproportionate use of force by police against protesters.

The organization called on the Kuwaiti authorities to ensure that Bidun who wish to peacefully protest are allowed to do so and that the law fully guarantees the right to freedom of assembly without discrimination, in line with international law.

Amnesty International also urged the Kuwaiti government to intensify its efforts to find a lasting solution to the situation of the Bidun. In particular, the Bidun’s human rights must be upheld without discrimination, in particular their rights to health, education and work.

2011 marked the 50th anniversary of Kuwait’s independence as well as the 50th anniversary of statelessness for the Bidun in Kuwait.