

EXTERNAL

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Deaths in custody/Fear for Safety

1 July 1997

BAHRAIN

'Abd al-Zahra Ibrahim 'Abdullah, aged 27
Shaikh 'Ali Mirza al-Nakkas, aged 50

Mass arrests and the deaths in custody of two prisoners in the past month have prompted fears for the safety of political detainees in Bahrain.

On 1 June 1997 'Abd al-Zahra Ibrahim 'Abdullah was among a group of demonstrators arrested in al-Sanabes and held incommunicado in al-Qal'a Prison. On 6 June his relatives were officially informed that he had died. A spokesman for the Bahraini Ministry of Interior reportedly announced on 8 June that 'Abd al-Zahra Ibrahim 'Abdullah had been released on 3 June and later died as a result of a "blood disorder". However, information received by Amnesty International suggested that 'Abd al-Zahra Ibrahim was admitted to al-Salmaniya Hospital in al-Manama on 3 June after his health had deteriorated. His body allegedly bore physical marks of torture.

On 29 June Shaikh 'Ali Mirza al-Nakkas, a blind Shi'a cleric, died in custody in al-Qal'a Prison in al-Manama where he had been held incommunicado since his arrest on 23 April, on charges of incitement against the government. His body was reportedly buried by the security forces on the same day. A spokesman for the Bahraini Ministry of Interior said on 30 June that Shaikh 'Ali Mirza al-Nakkas had died in prison from natural causes, suffering from respiratory problems. However, according to information received by Amnesty International his death may have been caused by lack of proper medical care.

Shaikh 'Ali Mirza al-Nakkas had previously been arrested on 22 January 1996 and sentenced to one years' imprisonment on charges of delivering political sermons in mosques. He was released in February 1997.

No thorough and independent investigations have been carried out into the circumstances surrounding the causes of these deaths or other deaths in custody since anti-government protests erupted in Bahrain in December 1994. The victims include Sa'id 'Abd al-Rasul al-Iskafi, a 16-year-old student from al-Sanabes, who was summoned for interrogation on 29 June 1995. On 8 July his family was told to collect his body from the Military Hospital. On 13 August 1996, al-Sayyid 'Ali al-Sayyid Amin al-'Alawi, aged 19, was arrested in the village of Karbabad. His body was handed over to his family four days later, reportedly bearing marks of torture.

Amnesty International fears for the safety of other political detainees and prisoners of conscience currently held incommunicado. There are currently hundreds of detainees held in various prisons in Bahrain.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

On 13 June Amnesty International wrote to the Bahraini authorities requesting that a full and thorough investigation into the death of 'Abd al-Zahra Ibrahim 'Abdullah be carried out and anyone found responsible be brought to justice. No response has been received from the government to date.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/telexes/faxes/express/airmail letters in English, Arabic or your own language:

- expressing deep concern at the deaths in custody of 'Abd al-Zahra Ibrahim 'Abdullah and Shaikh 'Ali Mirza al-Nakkas, reportedly as a result of torture and medical neglect;
- calling for full and thorough investigations into the circumstances surrounding the deaths of 'Abd al-Zahra Ibrahim 'Abdullah and Shaikh 'Ali Mirza al-Nakkas, for the results to be made public, and for anyone found responsible for their deaths be brought to justice;
- calling for all detainees to be protected from any form of torture or ill-treatment
- calling for all detainees to be granted immediate and continuing access to lawyers, family members and medical care.

APPEALS TO:

His Excellency
Shaikh Muhammad Bin Khalifa Al Khalifa
Minister of Interior
P.O. Box 13, Al-Manama, Bahrain
Telexes: 9572 PSMKT BN or 8333 ALAMAN BN
Telegrams: Minister of Interior, al-Manama, Bahrain
Faxes: +973 276765 or 290526
Salutation:Your Excellency

His Excellency
Shaikh Khalifa Bin Salman Al Khalifa
Prime Minister
P.O. Box 1000, al-Manama, Bahrain
Telexes: 9336 PROM BN or 7889 PMPO BN
Faxes: +973 533033
Salutation:Your Excellency

and to diplomatic representatives of Bahrain accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 12 August 1997.