

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT



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## **Bahrain must commit to accountability at Universal Periodic Review**

The Bahraini government must commit to releasing prisoners of conscience and ensuring true accountability for the human rights violations committed since February 2011, Amnesty International said today, ahead of Bahrain's review before the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) Working Group of the Human Rights Council in Geneva on 21 May.

Bahrain was the very first country to undergo a UPR process four years ago and on that occasion the government engaged very constructively, including by making numerous voluntary commitments and by responding positively to recommendations to take measures to address discrimination against women and to limit restrictions on freedom of expression. However, progress towards implementing those commitments and recommendations has been very slow.

More significantly still, the human rights situation in the country has recently deteriorated into a crisis, following the Bahraini authorities' heavy-handed response to widespread pro-reform protests that started in February 2011.

At least 60 people have been killed since February 2011 in connection with the protests, and the security forces continue to use excessive force against the protesters. Detainees have been subjected to torture and other ill-treatment in unofficial detention places. Scores of persons tried unfairly in military courts and sentenced to long-term prison sentences remain behind bars despite being convicted only for exercising their rights to freedom of expression and association.

In late June 2011, the King of Bahrain established the five-member Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry (BICI) to investigate alleged human rights violations during the protests. The BICI was led by Professor Cherif Bassiouni and comprised experts of internationally recognized independence, integrity and expertise. On 23 November 2011 the BICI submitted its report to the King and made detailed practical and legislative recommendations. The report confirmed that gross human rights violations had been carried out.

The Bahraini government promised full implementation of the BICI recommendations, including accountability for human rights violations. Despite some institutional and other reforms, the government's implementation of the BICI recommendations that relate to accountability for human rights violations has been inadequate. While 11 low-ranking policemen are currently on trial for involvement in human rights abuses, no senior member of the security forces responsible for the violations, including the National Security Agency and Bahrain Defence Force, is being brought to account.

While it cannot replace sustained attention by the Human Rights Council of the human rights situation in Bahrain, the upcoming UPR review represents an important moment for Bahrain and the international community to address the very serious human rights situation in the country and

to work together to agree timely and effective measures to ending these violations. At a time when a number of countries are, with good reason, vocally condemning human rights abuses in other Middle Eastern and North African countries, they must show equal commitment to pursuing justice and accountability for human rights violations in Bahrain.

For the government of Bahrain, this is an opportunity to show leadership in the UPR process as it endeavoured to do before. It should acknowledge violations of human rights that have occurred and ensure full accountability for them. It should also commit to informing the Human Rights Council regularly about progress in the implementation of the measures agreed and recommended by the UPR.

Amnesty International urges the international community to recommend to the government of Bahrain that they undertake the following measures:

- Immediately and unconditionally release all prisoners of conscience who were tried and sentenced by the National Safety Court or other courts and imprisoned solely for peacefully exercising their rights to freedom of expression and assembly, including the 14 prominent leaders of the opposition.
- In line with international standards, set up prompt, thorough, impartial and independent investigations (by an independent body outside the Public Prosecutor's Office) into all allegations of torture, deaths in custody and unlawful killings, including those resulting from unnecessary and excessive use of force, committed since the beginning of the February 2011 protests.
- Ensure that all those suspected of torture and unlawful killing, including those with command responsibility, or those who condoned or committed torture, unlawful killings and other human rights violations, regardless of their position or status in the government and ranking in the security and military forces, are held accountable, including in trials consistent with international fair trial guarantees and without recourse to the death penalty.

For Amnesty International's full submission on Bahrain to the UPR, see Bahrain: Protecting Human Rights After the Protest Index: (MDE 11/066/2011) at <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE11/066/2011/en>

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