

AI Index: PRE01/324/2013
01 July 2013

Bahrain must release teacher activist

The Bahraini Cassation Court's decision to uphold the convictions against two leaders of the Teachers Association is a charade and yet another example of the heavy price government critics pay in Bahrain for their views, Amnesty International said today.

Mahdi 'Issa Mahdi Abu Dheeb and Jalila al-Salman, the former president and vice-president of the Bahrain Teachers' Association were sentenced to 10 and three years imprisonment respectively on September 2011 after they called a teachers strike. They were charged with halting the educational process, inciting hatred of the regime, attempting to overthrow the ruling system by force.

"There hasn't been a shred of evidence of either teachers using or advocating violence. The trials were marred by irregularities, based on spurious evidence and their sentences should be quashed," said Hassiba Hadj Sahraoui, Deputy Director for the Middle East and North Africa at Amnesty International.

While an appeal hearing in October last year reduced their sentences, Mahdi 'Issa Mahdi Abu Dheeb's is still in Jaw prison, around 30 kilometres south of the capital Manama, serving a five year prison term. Following his arrest on 6 April 2011 he spent 64 days in solitary confinement, during which he says he was tortured. Jalila al-Salman's three year sentence was reduced to six months' imprisonment. She was released on 25 November after serving the remainder of her sentence and is now barred from teaching in state school because of her criminal conviction.

Mahdi 'Issa Mahdi Abu Dheeb is a prisoner of conscience imprisoned solely for exercising his rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly. .

As EU state officials and the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf (GCC) are convening in Bahrain for their annual ministerial meeting, Amnesty International is calling for all efforts must be made to ensure that Mahdi 'Issa Mahdi Abu Dheeb is immediately and unconditionally released.

"The complacency of Bahrain's allies and chiefly the UK towards Bahrain has simply embolden the authorities in their repressive tactics," said Hassiba Hadj Sahraoui.