

URGENT ACTION

BAHRAINI OPPOSITION FIGURES FACE UNFAIR TRIAL

14 opposition figures who led and participated in the demonstrations in February and March in Bahrain went on trial before a military court today. All 14 defendants denied the charges against them. Amnesty International opposes the trial of civilians before a military court. The trial will resume on 16 May 2011.

Today, fourteen defendants went on trial. Another seven were being tried in their absence. The 14 defendants are: **Hassan Mshaima**; **Ebrahim Sharif**; **Abdelwahab Hussain**, **'Abdulhadi al-Khawaja**; **Dr Abdel-Jalil al-Singace**; **Mohammad Habib al-Miqdad**; **Abdel-Jalil al-Miqdad**; **Sa'eed Mirza al-Nuri**; **Abdullah al-Mahroos**; **'Abdul-Hadi 'Abdullah Hassan al-Mukhodher**; **Al-Hur Yousef al-Somaikh**; **Salah 'Abdullah Hubail**; **Mohammad Hassan Jawwad**; and **Mohammad 'Ali Ridha Isma'il**.

Two foreign observers representing two international human rights groups were not allowed into the court. However, a few observers from local NGOs were present in the court.

Among the charges levelled against the defendants are that they set up "terror groups to topple the royal regime and change the constitution". Amnesty International is concerned that the charges are vague and may be politically motivated. During the court hearing, all defendants denied the charges against them. Lawyers asked the Military Prosecution to release the defendants on bail. However, this request was rejected.

Many of the defendants are likely to be prisoners of conscience detained solely for peacefully exercising their rights to freedom of expression and assembly and that they should be released immediately and unconditionally.

The defendants have been denied visits from their families in prison. Lawyers have been granted very limited access to them. They were allowed during questioning by the Military Prosecutor, but not during National Security Agency interrogations following the defendants' arrests. Some of the 14 defendants, like Ebrahim Sharif and 'Abdulhadi al-Khawaja have reportedly been tortured in detention. 'Abdulhadi al-Khawaja said today in court "today I was threatened in this place, my life is in danger."

PLEASE WRITE IMMEDIATELY in Arabic or English:

- Express concern that some defendants may be prisoners of conscience detained for their legitimate exercise of the rights to freedom of expression and association and urge the Bahraini authorities to release them immediately and unconditionally if they are held solely because of the criticism of the authorities;
 - Urge the Bahraini authorities to immediately grant all defendants immediate and regular visits for their lawyers and families and to protect them from torture or other ill-treatment;
 - Urge the authorities to allow international observers to be present in the next trial sessions;
- Urge the authorities to immediately set up an independent investigation into the alleged torture or other ill-treatment of some of the defendants, to make its results public, and bring to justice anyone responsible for torture.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 23 JUNE 2011 TO:

King

Shaikh Hamad bin 'Issa Al Khalifa
Office of His Majesty the King
P.O. Box 555
Rifa'a Palace, al-Manama, Bahrain
Fax: +973 17664587
Salutation: Your Majesty

Prime Minister

Prince Khalifa bin Salman Al Khalifa
Prime Minister
Office of the Prime Minister
P.O. Box 1000, al-Manama, Bahrain
Fax: +973 17533033
Salutation: Your Highness

Commander-in-Chief of the BDF

Marshal Shaikh Khalifa bin Ahmed
Al Khalifa
Bahrain Defence Force
Riffa Road, Bahrain
E-mail: dgcbdf@gmail.com
Fax: +971 17663923
Salutation: Your Excellency

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

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The 14 defendants have also been accused of “insulting the army; inciting hatred; disseminating false information; and taking part in rallies without notifying the authorities”. Amnesty International has previously called for the immediate release of some of the 14 defendants as the organization considered them to be prisoners of conscience: Hassan Mshaima, Dr ‘Abdel-Jalil al-Singace, ‘Abdel-Wahab Hussain, Sa’eed Mirza al-Nuri; Ebrahim Sharif and ‘Abdul-Hadi ‘Abdullah Hassan al-Mukhodher.

UA: 139/11 Index: MDE 11/026/2011 Issue Date: 12 May 2011

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