

**TO: HEALTH PROFESSIONALS**  
**FROM: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL**

# APPEAL FOR ACTION

## MEDICAL WORKERS ON TRIAL IN BAHRAIN ALLEGE TORTURE WHILE HELD INCOMMUNICADO

**Forty-eight medical workers, all possible prisoners of conscience, appeared before a military court on 6 June accused of felonies and misdemeanours. Some of them have told their families that they were tortured or otherwise ill-treated while held incommunicado in pre-trial detention, when they were not permitted access to their lawyers or families, and forced to sign statements including while blindfolded. Amnesty International fears that they may have been forced to sign "confessions" under torture or other ill-treatment which may be used as evidence against them at the trial, which will resume on 13 June.**

Forty-eight medical staff, including paramedics, nurses and doctors, appeared on 6 June before the National Safety Court of First Instance, a military court established under the state of emergency in force from 15 March-1 June 2011, which continues as a trial court. The 48 were charged with a range of offences linked to their involvement in pro-reform protests which occurred in February and March and were violently suppressed by the security forces resulting in around two dozen deaths and hundreds of arrests. The charges include "possession of unlicensed weapons; occupation of a public building (Salmaniya Medical Complex in Manama, Bahrain's capital); calling for regime change; seizure of medical equipment, spreading false news; public gathering without authorization, carrying unnecessary operations resulting in deaths of the patients and denying patients of treatment on sectarian bases." The court did not ask the defendants whether they plead guilty or not guilty to the charges but it is expected that they will enter not guilty pleas when the trial resumes.

The judges adjourned the trial to 13 June after defence lawyers protested that they had been denied access to their clients and the case files before the trial commenced, and the lawyers were then allowed to speak to their clients for the first time but only for about 10 minutes.

Some in the group of 48 medical workers were released on bail a few weeks ago, but the judges refused a defence request to release the rest of the group, which the military prosecutor opposed. One copy of the case file was provided to defence lawyers to make copies for themselves. The court session was attended by observers from the US and French embassies but no foreign journalists were allowed entry to the court.

Those in the group still in detention were permitted to meet their families for the first time since their arrest, but only briefly, at the end of the court session. Some told their families that they had been tortured or otherwise ill-treated in the first days after they were detained when they were interrogated by officials of the Criminal Investigations Directorate (CID). The alleged methods of torture include: beating with sticks, plastic tubes and fists, verbal assaults, spitting in the face, and being threatened with electric shocks, rape and being made to eat faeces. Detainees told their families they had been forced to sign false confessions that may be used against them at trial, in some cases while blindfolded.

One medical worker (name and gender withheld), who was released on bail a few weeks ago told Amnesty International, "I was taken to a room. They kept on slapping me, I was crying, I did not know what they wanted me to confess. They insulted me. I was there for a few minutes, then they took me back to the first room where they kept me standing up and blindfolded. They told me: 'if you don't confess you will be here for a long time'. I was standing up for hours. Then I spent the whole night in that room sitting on a chair in front of a cold air conditioning unit, it was very cold. The following day they took me for what they said was the military interrogation. They kept me standing up for a long time.

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Later on I was so tired that I kept quiet and only answered yes or no. After a while they gave me some papers and made me sign them while I was still blindfolded. I did not see what I signed, but I signed on 8 or 9 papers.”

The 48 are all civilians but they are nevertheless being tried before the National Safety Court of First Instance, which is a military court whose three judges include one military judge and two civilian judges. Amnesty International considers that military courts should never be used to try civilians and that such trials directly infringe international standards of fair trial. Appeals from the court are heard by another military court, the First Safety Court of Appeal; this has already upheld two death sentences in another trial not involving members of the medical profession.

**PLEASE WRITE IMMEDIATELY:**

- Explaining that you are a health professional concerned about human rights;
- Urging the authorities to carry out an immediate independent investigation into the alleged torture or other ill-treatment of these 48 medical workers and other detainees in Bahrain, make the results public, and bring to justice any officials responsible for torture or other ill-treatment of detainees.
- Urging the authorities to ensure that confessions obtained under torture are not submitted or used as evidence at the trial of the 48 medical staff or any other trials in Bahrain.
- Ensure that the 48 medical workers and other detainees are permitted immediate and regular access to lawyers of their own choosing, their relatives and any medical treatment that they may require, and that all detainees' places of detention are immediately disclosed;
- Express concern that, despite the serious charges brought against them, the 48 medical workers appear to have been detained and are being tried solely because of their peaceful efforts to provide medical assistance to people injured by government security forces during popular protests in February and March, in which case they would be prisoners of conscience and should be immediately and unconditionally released.

**PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 13/06/2011 TO:**

Minister of Social Development,  
Health and Human Rights  
Dr Fatima bint Mohammed Al  
Balooshi  
Ministry of Social Development  
PO Box 32868, Isa Town,  
Bahrain  
Fax: +973 17101955  
Salutation: Your Excellency

King Shaikh Hamad bin 'Issa Al  
Khalifa  
Office of His Majesty the King  
P.O. Box 555  
Rifa'a Palace, al-Manama,  
Bahrain  
Fax: + 73 17664587  
Salutation: Your Majesty

Commander-in-Chief of the  
Bahrain Defence Force  
Marshal Shaikh Khalifa bin  
Ahmed Al Khalifa  
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Riffa Road  
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e-mail: dgcbdf@gmail.com  
Fax: +973 17663923  
Salutation: Your Excellency

IF YOU RECEIVE NO REPLY WITHIN SIX WEEKS OF SENDING YOUR LETTER, PLEASE SEND A FOLLOW-UP LETTER SEEKING A RESPONSE. PLEASE SEND COPIES OF ANY LETTERS YOU RECEIVE TO THE INTERNATIONAL SECRETARIAT, ATTENTION OF THE HEALTH TEAM, 1 EASTON STREET, LONDON WC1X 0DW OR E-MAIL: [health@amnesty.org](mailto:health@amnesty.org)

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