

URGENT ACTION

DEFENCE LAWYER APPEARS IN COURT

A prominent defence lawyer arrested in Bahrain on 15 April appeared in court on 12 June without any prior notice being given to his family or lawyers. His case will resume on 16 June. Amnesty international believes he is a prisoner of conscience who has been detained for his work as a human rights lawyer and exercising his right to freedom of expression in relation to it.

Mohammed al-Tajer, a prominent Bahraini defence lawyer, was arrested at his house in Manama, the capital of Bahrain, on the night of 15 April. He was arrested without an arrest warrant by a group of over 20 masked security officers who then took him to an unknown location. Since his arrest, his family and lawyers have not been able to visit him or to obtain information on his place of detention; he has been allowed to call his family on only three occasions for a period of three minutes each time.

On 12 June, Mohammed al-Tajer was brought before the National Safety Court of First Instance, a military court, although his family and lawyers had not been informed about the session beforehand. Some lawyers who were in the court that day and saw him informed the judge that they wanted to represent him and apparently one lawyer was present during the trial. However, formal requests sent by his lawyers to the military prosecutor before 12 June asking to visit him and represent him have never been answered. Mohammed al-Tajer has been formally charged with offences that include spreading rumours and malicious news and incitement of hatred towards the regime. He has pleaded not guilty. His trial is scheduled to resume on 16 June.

Amnesty International believes that Mohammed al-Tajer's detention and trial is in fact related to his work defending human rights and political opposition activists, for which he is well known, as well as to his public criticism of the government's oppression. He was the leading defence lawyer in the case of 25 opposition activists, including two charged in their absence, who were tried between October 2010 and February 2011 on charges of plotting to overthrow the government using "terrorism" and other means. The 23 were released on 23 February following an amnesty by the King of Bahrain. Some of them, including 'Abdul Jalil al-Singace, have been recently re-arrested for their participation in the protests and face trial on 22 June. Mohammed al-Tajer has openly spoken to media outlets about these cases and about human rights violations more widely in Bahrain.

PLEASE WRITE IMMEDIATELY in English or Arabic:

- Expressing concern that Mohammed al-Tajer is a prisoner of conscience detained for his prominent work as a human rights lawyer and for exercising his right to freedom of expression in relation to it, and should therefore be released immediately and unconditionally;
- Urging the authorities to reveal Mohammad al-Tajer's place of detention without further delay, to ensure that he is protected from torture or other ill-treatment and is allowed prompt and regular access to his lawyers and family.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 18 JULY 2011 TO:

King

Shaikh Hamad bin 'Issa Al Khalifa
Office of His Majesty the King
P.O. Box 555
Rifa'a Palace, Manama, Bahrain
Fax: +973 1766 4587

Salutation: Your Majesty

Minister of Justice and Islamic Affairs

Shaikh Khaled bin Ali Al Khalifa
Ministry of Justice and Islamic Affairs
P. O. Box 450, Manama, Bahrain
Fax: +973 17531284

Salutation: Your Excellency

Commander-in-Chief of the Bahrain

Defence Force

Marshal Shaikh Khalifa bin Ahmed Al
Khalifa

Bahrain Defence Force
Riffa Road, Manama, Bahrain

e-mail: dgcbedf@gmail.com

Fax: +973 17663923

Salutation: Your Excellency

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date. This is the first update of UA 116/11. Further information: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE11/018/2011/en>

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INTERNATIONAL**



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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

At least 500 people have been detained in relation to the pro-reform protests which began in February and four have died in custody in suspicious circumstances. Dozens of those detained have been brought to trial before military courts, which have convicted a number of defendants, handing down sentences ranging from short prison terms to, in two cases so far, the death penalty. A state of emergency imposed by the Bahraini authorities on 15 March – known as the State of National Safety – was lifted on 1 June.

Mohammad al-Tajer is being tried by the National Safety Court of First Instance, which is a military court comprising three judges - one military and two civilian. Amnesty International considers military courts inappropriate for trying 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.

FU: 116/11 Index: MDE 11/032/2011 Issue Date: 13 June 2011

