

URGENT ACTION

POSITIVE DEVELOPMENTS IN MEDICS' CIVILIAN APPEAL

The appeal hearing of 20 Bahraini health professionals previously sentenced by a military court opened before the High Criminal Court of Appeal, a civilian court, on 23 October. Some charges were dropped. The next court hearing is due on 28 November. They could still be at risk of unfair trial.

The 20 health professionals were previously sentenced to between five and 15 years in prison by a military court in connection with popular protests in February and March. The trial hearing before a civilian court on 23 October lasted around 30 minutes. Seventeen of the defendants, all of whom were previously released on bail, were present. Journalists, local NGO representatives and embassy officials also attended.

There were several positive developments. Three serious charges previously brought against the defendants were dropped: "incitement of hatred against the regime", "spreading false news" and "inciting others not to comply with the applicable laws or to do any act that constitutes a crime". However, the 20 continue to face other charges, including: "possession of unlicensed weapons", "occupation of a public building" (Salmaniya Medical Complex in Manama, Bahrain's capital), and "calling for the overthrow of the regime by force".

It also emerged that 'confessions' the defendants say they were forced to sign under torture or other duress while in pre-trial detention, will no longer be used as evidence at the trial. The court ruled that defence lawyers can present witnesses at the next session on 28 November, and that all 20 defendants can remain free on bail until a final verdict is announced. The defence lawyers requested the court to lift the travel ban imposed on the defendants and that reports on allegations of torture investigated by the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry be submitted to the court or otherwise there should be a new independent investigation into allegations of torture.

Please write immediately in English or Arabic:

- Welcome the authorities' decision to allow the defendants to have an appeal hearing before a civilian court and urge that the appeal is held in full conformity with international standards for fair trial
- 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.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 28 NOVEMBER 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: +973 176 64 587/ +973 17664587

Salutation: Your Majesty

Prime Minister

Prince Khalifa bin Salman Al Khalifa
Office of the Prime Minister
P.O. Box 1000, al-Manama, Bahrain
Fax: +973 175 33 033

Salutation: Your Highness

Minister of Justice and Islamic Affairs

Shaikh Khalid bin Ali bin Abdullah Al Khalifa
Ministry of Justice and Islamic Affairs
P.O. Box 13, al-Manama, Bahrain
Fax: +973 175 31 284

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 second update of UA 296/11. Further information:

www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE11/053/2011/en, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE11/054/2011/en>

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The 20 individuals sentenced on 29 September are among 48 health professionals from the Salmaniya Medical Complex who were arrested in March and April 2011. Some of them had been vocal in giving interviews to foreign media and accusing the government of atrocities against protesters. All were held incommunicado for several weeks. In most cases their families did not know their whereabouts for most of this time and were only allowed to see them during the first session of their trial before the National Safety Court of First Instance, a military court, that started on 6 June. The 48 were split into two groups on 13 June: 20 of them were accused of felonies, or more serious offences, while the remaining were accused of misdemeanours, or less serious offences. Many of them started hunger strike in protest at their detention and trial and were gradually released on bail in August and September 2011.

'Ali 'Esa Mansoor al-'Ekri, Nader Mohammed Hassan Dewani, Ahmed 'Abdulaziz Omran Hassan, Mahmood Asghar 'Abdulwahab, 'Abdulkhaleq 'Ali Hussain al-'Oraibi, Ghassan Ahmed 'Ali Dhaif, Bassim Ahmed 'Ali Dhaif, Ebrahim 'Abdullah Ebrahim, Sayed Marhoon Majid al-Wedaei, Roula Jassim Mohammed al-Saffar, Nada Sa'eed 'Abdelnabi Dhaif, 'Ali Hassan al-Sadadi and Qassim Mohammad 'Omran were sentenced to 15 years in prison. Hassan Mohammed Sa'eed Nasser and Sa'eed Mothaher Habib Al Samahiji were sentenced to 10 years' imprisonment. Fatima Salman Hassan Haji, Dhia Ibrahim Ja'far, Najah Khalil Ibrahim Hassan, Zahra Mahdi al-Sammak and Mohammed Faeq 'Ali Al Shehab were sentenced to five years in prison.

The arrests of the health professionals followed a crackdown on anti-government protesters in Bahrain in mid-March. On 16 March the government sent in the security forces, backed by helicopters and tanks, to storm the Pearl Roundabout area and forcibly evict the peaceful protesters gathered there. In the ensuing clashes, at least two protesters and two police officers were reported killed and dozens of people were injured by the security forces as they violently cleared the area of protesters. The security forces also took similar action to forcibly evict protesters from the nearby Financial Harbour area.

As in mid-February 2011, when conducting these and other actions against the protesters, the security forces used rubber bullets, tear gas and, in some cases, live ammunition, sometimes at very close range, and in circumstances where the use of weapons such as shotguns and other firearms could not be justified on the grounds that this was necessary to protect their own or others' lives. Such excessive force was used in Manama and also, according to information gathered by Amnesty International, in Sitra, Nuwaiderat and al-Ma'ameer. Witnesses told Amnesty International that soldiers and other security forces had fired tear gas at people close to the entrance to the Sitra Medical Centre and at the Salmaniya Medical Complex, where some protesters, including injured people receiving medical treatment were also said to have been arrested and taken away.

As the military and security forces took control of the Pearl Roundabout, the Financial Harbour and the Salmaniya Medical Complex, they launched an orchestrated crackdown on Shi'a political and community leaders and activists who had been prominent in leading the protests and who had publicly criticized members of the royal family and called for a change of government during protests at the Pearl Roundabout or other demonstrations and marches. Hundreds of people have since been arrested and many are on trial and have been sentenced on charges, including "inciting hatred towards the regime".

Names: 'Ali 'Esa Mansoor al-'Ekri (m), Nader Mohammed Hassan Dewani (m), Ahmed 'Abdulaziz Omran Hassan (m), Mahmood Asghar 'Abdulwahab (m), 'Abdulkhaleq 'Ali Hussain al-'Oraibi (m), Ghassan Ahmed 'Ali Dhaif (m), Bassim Ahmed 'Ali Dhaif (m), Ebrahim 'Abdullah Ebrahim (m);, Sayed Marhoon Majid al-Wedaei (m); Roula Jassim Mohammed al-Saffar (f), Nada Sa'eed 'Abdelnabi Dhaif (f), 'Ali Hassan al-Sadadi (m), Qassim Mohammad 'Omran (m) Hassan Mohammed Sa'eed Nasser (m), Sa'eed Mothaher Habib Al Samahiji (m), Fatima Salman Hassan Haji (f), Dhia Ibrahim Ja'far (f), Najah Khalil Ibrahim Hassan (f), Zahra Mahdi al-Sammak (f) and Mohammed Faeq 'Ali Al Shehab (m)

Further information on UA: 296/11 Index: MDE 11/058/2011 Issue Date: 25 October 2011