

URGENT ACTION

COURT IN BAHRAIN JAILS 14 FOR PROTESTING

Bahrain's High Criminal Court of Appeal has upheld the six-month prison sentences of 14 people convicted of, among other things, taking part in an "illegal gathering". Amnesty International believes they may be prisoners of conscience.

The High Criminal Court of Appeal in the capital, Manama, upheld on 24 November the six-month prison sentences handed down to a group of 14 protesters. International observers were present during the hearing.

Lawyers have said they will appeal to the Court of Cassation over irregularities in the conduct of the trial. These include the fact that they were not allowed to bring in defense witnesses (it seems that the only witnesses who appeared in court were women police officers), that their request to see a CD used by the prosecution as evidence against the defendants was rejected and that, as had happened in the original trial, they were not permitted to refer any of the accused who had alleged torture to a forensic doctor for examination. Some of those sentenced alleged that they were tortured or otherwise ill-treated during interrogation.

A lower criminal court had sentenced the 14 – consisting of 12 females, of whom three were under 18, and two men – to six months in prison, on 20 October, for taking part in an "illegal gathering of more than five persons", "incitement to hatred of the regime", "assaulting policewomen" and "participating in illegal marches". All 14 had been part of a larger group of 46 people who were arrested, mostly in Manama's City Center Mall, for attempting to march towards the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Roundabout (better known as the Pearl Roundabout) on 23 September. Six others were tried and acquitted on 20 October, while the remaining 26 had been released without charge before then. The women and girls were not allowed access to lawyers before they appeared in court. All of those sentenced denied committing or planning to commit any act of violence.

Please write immediately in English, Arabic or your own language:

- Expressing concern that the 14 people whose convictions were upheld on 24 November may be prisoners of conscience, imprisoned solely for exercising their rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly, in which case they should be released immediately and unconditionally;
- Urging the authorities to open an immediate, independent investigation into allegations that some of the 14 were tortured or otherwise ill-treated in detention, and to bring those responsible to justice;
- Urging them to grant the prisoners unhindered access to their lawyers, and ensure they are protected from all forms of torture or other ill-treatment.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 18 JANUARY 2012 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 17664587
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

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country.

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Scores of health workers, opposition and human rights activists, teachers and others are facing trials in Bahrain. Months have passed since scores of people demonstrated at the Pearl Roundabout in February and March 2011, but the human rights situation in Bahrain is still very grim. Hundreds of people suspected of being connected with the anti-government protests are detained amid serious allegations of torture; scores of them have received unfair trials before military courts; and at least 2,500 others have been suspended or fired from their jobs.

Fourteen opposition figures who led and participated in the demonstrations in February and March were sentenced on 22 June to harsh prison terms, including seven life sentences, on broadly-worded terrorism charges. Their sentences were upheld by a military court of appeal on 28 September.

On 29 June, the King decreed that all cases linked to the February-March 2011 protests would be transferred to ordinary civilian courts; he then issued a further decree on 18 August (Decree 28/20011) ordering that the National Safety Court of First Instance continue to deal with felony (serious criminal) cases, while misdemeanour (less serious) cases would be referred to the civilian courts. In early October trials before these courts stopped and since then all trials have been heard before civilian courts.

Names: names known to Amnesty International

Gender m/f: 12 female, two male

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