

URGENT ACTION

WOMEN ACTIVISTS RELEASED BUT CHARGES REMAIN

Zainab al-Khawaja and Ma'suma Sayyid Sharaf were released on 20 December. They had been arrested on 15 December for participating in a protest. However, the charges against them remain and Amnesty International is calling for them to be dropped.

Zainab al-Khawaja and Ma'suma Sayyid Sharaf were released on 20 December but the charges against them - illegal public gathering, showing contempt for the regime and assaulting a police officer - have not been dropped. They have not been informed if a trial against them will still go ahead and, if so, when it would start.

Both women were arrested on 15 December after the police dispersed a peaceful protest at a roundabout in the outskirts of Manama, using tear gas and sound bombs. When police arrested Zainab al-Khawaja, she was the only person remaining at the roundabout. They dragged her to a van. The police then arrested Ma'suma Sayyid Sharaf, who had filmed the whole scene. Zainab al-Khawaja told Amnesty International that once she reached al-Budaiye' police station, on the outskirts of Manama, she was punched in the head and kicked, and that Mas'uma Sayyid Sharaf was kicked and spat on. Both women have denied assaulting a police officer.

Please write immediately in English or Arabic:

- Expressing concern that Zainab al-Khawaja and Ma'suma Sayyid Sharaf have been charged solely for exercising their rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly and demanding that the charges should be dropped;
- Urging the Bahraini authorities to immediately carry out an independent and impartial investigation into the allegations that the women were beaten during arrest and to bring anyone found responsible to justice.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 2 FEBRUARY 2012 TO:

His Majesty the 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
Salutation: Your Majesty

Minister of Interior
Shaikh Rashid bin 'Abdullah bin Ahmad
Al Khalifa
Ministry of Interior
P.O. Box 13, al-Manama,
Bahrain
Fax: +973 172 32 661
Salutation: Your Excellency

Minister of Human Rights and Social
Development
Dr Fatima bint Mohammed Al Balooshi
Ministry of Human Rights and Social
Development
P.O. Box 32868, Manama, Bahrain
Fax: +973 171 04 977
e-mail: pr@social.gov.bh
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 365/11. Further information:
<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE11/067/2011/en>

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Months have passed since scores of people demonstrated at the Pearl Roundabout in February and March. However, many health workers, opposition and human rights activists, teachers and others are still facing trials or are serving prison sentences in Bahrain.

Zainab al-Khawaja is the daughter of Abdulhadi al-Khawaja, a prominent opposition activist and human rights defender sentenced on 21 June to life in prison for his involvement in the protests in Bahrain (see UA 139/11). He alleges he was tortured in prison. His daughter Zainab al-Khawaja has been very critical about the Bahraini authorities when speaking to the international media about the crackdown on protesters and her father's unfair trial and torture. Zainab al-Khawaja's husband was also sentenced in October to four years in prison for his involvement in the protests. In April 2011, Zainab al-Khawaja staged a hunger strike to protest against the arrest of her father.

On 23 November, the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry (BICI), established by Royal Decree on 29 June to investigate abuses during the March/February protests and other abuses in the following months, issued its 500 page report.

Hundreds of cases of human rights violations were covered in the report, including beatings of protesters by security forces, mass arbitrary arrests of mainly Shi'a opposition activists and widespread torture, with five deaths resulting from torture in custody. At least 46 people have died in connection with the protests, including five security personnel. The report urged the Bahraini government to immediately establish an independent body made up of representatives of civil society, the opposition and the government; to oversee the implementation of the BICI's recommendations; to usher in legislative reforms to ensure laws are in line with international human rights standards; and to bring to account those responsible for abuses.

Name: Zainab al-Khawaja and Ma'suma Sayyid Sharaf
Gender m/f: Both female

Further information on UA: 365/11 Index: MDE 11/069/2011 Issue Date: 22 December 2011