

# URGENT ACTION

## BIDUN ARRESTED AFTER PEACEFUL PROTESTS

**At least 25 members of the Bidun community in Kuwait were arrested between 2 and 8 October 2012 following peaceful protests where they denounced ongoing human rights abuses against Kuwait's stateless people. They may be prisoners of conscience.**

On 2 October 2012, International Day of Non-Violence, hundreds of Bidun - stateless people who are long-term residents of Kuwait - gathered in Taima's Freedom Square in al-Jahra Governorate, calling for a resolution to their decades-long statelessness and an end to their social exclusion. Despite increased security, the demonstrators assembled in the square after leaving an adjacent mosque but were soon met by riot and security forces who used plastic bullets, tear gas and sound bombs to disperse the protestors. Over 20, were arrested, 18 of whom remain in detention. Following the arrests, further demonstrations planned for 5 October did not take place as a result of a heavy presence of security forces but further arrests of Bidun took place during the night and into the next day. Some Bidun activists have been asked to hand themselves over to the authorities.

At least 25 people are still detained and face charges including "being present in a restricted area", "staging an unauthorized demonstration", "rioting", "attacking and opposing police officers" and "disobeying orders to disperse". Most of those arrested are reportedly being held in the Central Prison and two in the Criminal Investigation detention facility. On 5 October, five juveniles aged between 14 and 17 years old were also arrested in front of their homes, accused of participating in the demonstrations. Held in a juvenile detention centre, they were released on payment of KD200 (about US\$ 710) bail on 9 October.

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

- Calling on the Kuwaiti authorities to release the 25 detainees immediately and unconditionally, if they are held solely for peacefully expressing their right to freedom of expression, assembly and association;
- Calling on the authorities to ensure that security forces follow international policing standards in policing all demonstrations in Kuwait;
- Stressing that the 25 detainees must be protected from torture or other ill-treatment, allowed access to their families, lawyers of their choosing and any necessary medical treatment;
- Asking the authorities to stop unlawfully restricting the freedoms of association, assembly and expression.

### **PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 20 NOVEMBER 2012 TO:**

Amir of the State of Kuwait  
His Highness Sheikh Sabah al-Ahmad  
al-Jaber Al Sabah  
al-Diwan al-Amiri, al-Safat, Kuwait  
Fax: +965 22430559  
Email: amirsoffice@da.gov.kw  
**Salutation: Your Highness**

Minister of Justice  
His Excellency Mohammad Mohsen al-  
Afasi  
Minister of Justice  
Ministry of Justice  
PO Box 6, al-Safat 1300, Kuwait  
Email: info@moj.gov.kw  
**Salutation: Your Excellency**

**And copies to:**  
Chairperson  
Parliamentary Human Rights Committee  
National Assembly  
P.O. Box 716, al-Safat 13008, Kuwait  
Fax: +965 2245 5806  
Email: ipu-grp@kna.kw (In subject line:  
FAO Chairperson of the Parliamentary  
Human Right Committee)

**Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country**

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

**AMNESTY  
INTERNATIONAL**



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### ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

2011 marked the 50th anniversary of Kuwait's independence as well as the 50th anniversary of statelessness for the Bidun community in Kuwait. They have been protesting against their continuing statelessness and to demand Kuwaiti nationality, which would allow them to access free education, free health care and employment opportunities on the same basis as Kuwaiti citizens.

There are in excess of 100,000 Bidun in Kuwait. Many are descendants of migrant, Bedouin tribes that roamed freely across the borders of the Gulf region but because their ancestors failed to understand the importance of citizenship or given their centuries-old way of life they did not want to belong to any one country and still others were illiterate, they did not apply for nationality. A great many Bidun assert that the majority are in possession of legal documents that prove their longstanding and continuous settlement in Kuwait.

In 1959 the Nationality Law was brought to effect and it defined Kuwaiti nationals as persons who were settled in Kuwait prior to 1920 and who maintained their normal residence there until the publication of the law. Many were therefore recognized as Kuwaiti citizens, others were naturalized and were granted partial rights, and the remaining group were identified as Bidun.

Many were included in the 1965 census, a key criterion towards gaining recognition as Kuwaiti citizens. Others still served in the army and the police forces. During the 1980s, the security situation in Kuwait deteriorated, and the attitude towards the Bidun changed: they no longer had access to government schools, free health care, and certain government jobs. Government officials stated that most Bidun were nationals of neighbouring countries and that they had destroyed their documents in order to claim the benefits granted to Kuwaiti nationals, and that they were therefore "illegal residents." Following the 1991 Iraqi invasion and the liberation of Kuwait, large numbers Bidun were suspected of collaboration with the enemy and were therefore no longer considered part of Kuwaiti society. Many lost their jobs in the country's army and police forces and other jobs in the public sector.

Inspired by protests which broke out in 2011 in the wider Middle East and North Africa region, the Bidun community have been protesting peacefully since February 2011, demanding to be recognized as citizens of Kuwait. The security forces have used force to disperse demonstrations and arrested protesters, some of whom are facing trial for participating in the demonstrations. The government said it would address some Bidun grievances but stated that only 34,000 Bidun were eligible for citizenship.

On 27 September 2012, Amnesty International issued a joint letter, *Kuwait: Joint open letter to His Highness the Amir of Kuwait regarding the Bidun*, <http://amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE17/004/2012/en> (Index: MDE 17/004/2012) with two other organizations.

The Bidun community is expected to continue organizing peaceful protests in support of their demands.

Name: Members of the Bidun community

Gender: m

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