
PRESS RELEASE - THE OBSERVATORY

BAHRAIN: Series of harsh, disproportionate and unfair sentences against professionals for standing by human rights victims

Paris-Geneva, September 30, 2011. *The International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) and the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT), in the framework of their joint programme, the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, express their utmost concern following a series of harsh criminal sentences targeting civil society leaders for their involvement in the popular protest movement that started on February 14, 2011, and for denouncing human rights violations committed by the authorities during its repression. Such decisions demonstrate that the authorities continue to stifle civil society, notably human rights defenders in Bahrain, through criminalisation and de-legitimation of their role.*

On September 29, 2011, Bahrain National Safety Court sentenced 20 doctors and medical workers who provided medical assistance to demonstrators injured during the crackdown on demonstrations to heavy prison sentences ranging from five to 15 years on charges of “possession of unlicensed weapons”, occupying Salmanya Medical Complex”, “calling for the overthrow of the regime”, “seizing medical equipment” and “spreading false information”¹.

On September 25, the same court had already sentenced two heads of the Teachers' Association of Bahrain, Mr. **Mahdi Abu Deeb**, President, and Ms. **Jalila Salman**, Vice-President, to respectively ten and three years in prison on charges of “disrupting schooling”, “broadcasting false news” and “threatening national security” for expressing solidarity with the popular protest movement in Bahrain and for denouncing human rights violations committed during its repression. Several of them were reportedly tortured during pre-trial detention and deprived from access to their lawyer and family over long periods of time. Mr. Mahdi Abu Deeb is detained in Gurain military prison, while an arrest warrant was issued against Ms. Jalila Salman, who was in provisional release at the time of the verdict.

On September 28, 14 opposition leaders and human rights defenders were also sentenced in appeal to heavy prison terms, including life imprisonment for Messrs. **Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja**, former President of the Bahrain Centre for Human Rights (BCHR) and former Middle East Region Coordinator for Front Line Defenders, and **Abduljalil al-Sengais**, in charge of the Human Rights Unit of Haq Movement for Civil Liberties and Democracy. Both are currently detained in Gurain military prison and have 30 days to appeal before the Court of Cassation.

The Observatory recalls that the National Security Court, presided over by a military judge, was created on March 15, 2011 under the law establishing the state of emergency and with no respect for guarantees of a fair trial, to try those suspected of having supported, organised or taken part in the protest movement.

¹ The doctors Messrs. **Ali Al-Ekri**, **Ali Alsadady**, **Nader Al-Diwani**, **Ahmed Omran**, **Mahmood Asghar**, **Ebrahim Al-Demestany**, **Abdulkhaleq Al-Oraiby**, **Ghassan Dhaif**, **Basem Daif**, **Sayed Marhoon Al-Weda'y**, **Qasem Omran**, Ms. **Rula Al-Saffar**, President of the Bahrain Nursing Society (BNS), and Ms. **Nada Dhaif** were sentenced to 15 years in prison; Messrs. **Hassan Al-Tublani** and **Saeed Al-Samaheejy** to ten years; Ms. **Fatima Hajji**, Ms. **Dia Ebrahim Abuldris**, Ms. **Najah Khalil Al-Haddad**, Ms. **Zahra Al-Sammak** and Mr. **Mohamed Al-Shehab** to five years. The convicts, who were all in provisional release at the time of the verdict, have the right to appeal within 15 days the sentences before the Criminal Supreme Appeal Court (ordinary court) according to Decree by Law (28), 2011 and will have to report to prison within that time to be allowed to lodge their appeal. The 20 were originally part of a group of 48 medical workers charged on May 3, 2011, which was split into two groups, one of 20 accused of “felonies” and the other 28 accused of “misdemeanours”, or less serious offences. All those accused of misdemeanours were released on bail by the end of June. Their case will resume on October 24 before an ordinary court. The group of 20 was released on bail between June and September 7. See Observatory Urgent Appeal BHR 005 / 0511 / OBS 073.

The Observatory expresses its deepest concern about the sentences against the above-mentioned human rights defenders as it considers that they seem to merely aim at sanctioning their human rights activities and that their right to a fair trial has been disregarded. Accordingly, the Observatory calls upon the Bahraini authorities to guarantee in all circumstances their physical and psychological integrity, to immediately and unconditionally release those detained and to put an end to all acts of harassment - including at the judicial level - against all human rights defenders.

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