

TO: HEALTH PROFESSIONALS
FROM: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

APPEAL FOR ACTION

UPDATE: ATTACKS AGAINST HEALTH PROFESSIONALS MUST BE INVESTIGATED

Amnesty International researchers in Bahrain have gathered testimonies from health professionals who report being attacked by security forces in the morning of 17 February, hours after a large number of state security personnel entered the Pearl Roundabout in Manama to evict protesters who were staying in tents they had erected. Between 3 and approximately 7 am around 200 people were taken by ambulances to Al-Salmaniya medical unit. However, after that time, ambulances were prevented from entering the roundabout area apparently because the Interior Ministry informed the Health Ministry wrongly that the area had been cleared and there were no more injured people there.

The assaults by security forces constituted criminal acts and were carried out in breach of international law enforcement standards, which stipulate that law enforcement officials may use force only when strictly necessary and to the extent required by the particular circumstances, including any threat posed to their lives or the lives of others. Although the government has since tempered its use of force against protesters, Amnesty International remains concerned that the attacks on health professionals were unprovoked and unjustifiable, and is urging that they be immediately investigated, fully and independently, and for those responsible to be brought to justice.



Dr Sadeq al-'Ekri (pictured left a few days after he was attacked) helped set up a mobile clinic in a tent on the Pearl Roundabout on 15 February. The mobile clinic had received several donations from members of the public and had a number of volunteers helping to care for injured protesters. At about 3 am on 17 February Dr al-'Ekri heard people screaming. Riot police started shooting and throwing teargas at the protesters. They also destroyed the tents of protesters as well as those erected by the health staff.

Dr al-'Ekri told Amnesty International that he was surrounded by police in dark uniforms, who then tied his hands behind his back. They forced him onto a bus, pulled his trousers down and proceeded to punch him and beat him with sticks all over his body, including his genitals. One officer covered his face with a shirt and

sat him in a chair and said: "if your blood spoils my chair I will beat you to death." The same officer went outside and asked another officer to come inside, and they both continued to kick him and hit him with sticks. Dr al-'Ekri reports that one of the officers said, "Let him breathe", and the other said, "This is just the beginning" and then threatened sexual abuse. When Dr al-'Ekri told them he was a doctor they came back with a torch and could see his white blouse and a Red Crescent sign. They then took him and two others to an ambulance which took them to Al-Salmaniya medical unit. Dr al-'Ekri suffered a broken nose, injured left eye and bruises on his chest and abdomen. He recounts his horrifying experience by saying, "These physical injuries will disappear but the psychological damage will not disappear. The body damage can be repaired but the psychological damage can't. I couldn't believe that this would happen in Bahrain."

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Amnesty International spoke with more than a dozen ambulance staff who worked that day and the majority said they had been beaten, insulted and threatened by the riot police. At around 9 am on 17 February, a convoy of five clearly marked ambulances was driving between Al-Salmuniya medical unit and the Pearl Roundabout, when it was stopped by anti-riot police at a traffic light. The ambulance workers were all wearing their uniforms and were clearly identified as health professionals.

Jamil 'Abdullah Ebrahim (pictured right a few days after the attack) had already made the trip at least three times when he received a call to return to the Roundabout. Jamil described the situation, "I thought they were going to show us victims to help, but they came to both side doors and opened them." Jamil said, "I am a paramedic", but the police pulled him out and started beating him. Jamil tried to run away, but he was chased and pulled to the ground. He says, "About a dozen were there, beating me with sticks, black wooden sticks about 60 cm long. Some took off their helmets to hit me with them.... I thought I was going to die." Jamil says they beat him on his back and buttocks while one officer was video-taping the attack. The attack was finally over after about five or six minutes when another officer yelled "Stop" and pulled him up. Jamil was returned to the ambulance covered in blood where he found his colleague '**Issa Salman**, with blood pouring down his face as a result of being hit twice on the head with a rifle-butt. 'Issa Salman had previously returned to duty after being kicked and beaten two hours earlier by some 20 police who had pulled him out of his ambulance. The officers told the medics "If you come back I will kill you." Jamil says he saw three senior officers standing about 50 metres away who watched the assaults but failed to intervene. Jamil was examined at the hospital but found to have no broken bones, though he now has pain and experiences difficulty when moving his hand and shoulder, which he used to protect his head during the assault.



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Paramedic **Ja'fer Hasan**, 34 years old, was in the same group of ambulances. He reports that when they reached the lines of the police, they were surrounded by officers who smashed the windows of the ambulance with rifle butts. They pulled him out of the vehicle and beat him all over with 'harawa' (a kind of stick) on his arms and shoulders. They also kicked him for about five minutes while shouting insults at him.



In the last ambulance assistant paramedic **Jassem Mohamed Hassan** (pictured left a few days after he was attacked), aged 27, also reported being beaten with sticks and guns. He says that while he was being kicked, one police officer shouted "No, he's Filipino", but when they lifted his head and saw he was Bahraini they continued to beat him. They also beat **Yasser Mahdi**, another paramedic accompanying him and who then required admission to hospital with abdominal trauma. The officers yelled at both men, "Get into the ambulances and don't come back. If you do, we will kill you."

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PLEASE WRITE IMMEDIATELY:

- Explaining that you are a health professional concerned about human rights;
- Urging the authorities to ensure immediate protection for all health and medical workers attending victims of violence and full protection of the right to all appropriate medical care of those suffering injuries;
- Calling on the authorities to immediately establish an independent and thorough investigation into the assaults on health and medical workers and the blocking of movement of ambulances, and to bring to justice those found responsible for these serious violations of human rights;
- Urging that doctors, nurses, paramedics and other health and medical workers are able to carry out without discrimination their professional responsibilities to provide emergency and other medical care to those who have sustained injuries, and to document and report on their injuries, without interference or fear of reprisal.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 31/03/2011 TO:

Minister of Interior

Shaikh Rashid bin 'Abdullah bin Ahmad Al Khalifa
Minister of Interior
Ministry of Interior
P.O. Box 13, al-Manama, Bahrain
Fax: +973 17232661
Salutation: Your Excellency

Minister of Health

His Excellency
Dr. Faisal Bin Yagoob al-Hamer
Minister of Health
Ministry of Health
P.O. Box 12, al-Manama, Bahrain
Salutation: Your Excellency
Fax: +973 17252569

Also, send **copies** of your letters to the Bahrain Medical Society: E-mail: bms@bms.bh

IF YOU RECEIVE NO REPLY WITHIN SIX WEEKS OF SENDING YOUR LETTER, PLEASE SEND A FOLLOW-UP LETTER SEEKING A RESPONSE. PLEASE SEND COPIES OF ANY LETTERS YOU RECEIVE TO THE INTERNATIONAL SECRETARIAT, ATTENTION OF THE HEALTH TEAM, 1 EASTON STREET, LONDON WC1X 0DW OR E-MAIL: health@amnesty.org

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Demonstrations in support of political reform started in Manama on 14 February 2011. On 14 and 15 February two protesters were killed by the riot police. Subsequently, an informal "camp" was established in Pearl Roundabout in central Manama where protesters stayed. In the early hours of Thursday 17 February 2011 a large number of security personnel entered the Roundabout to evict protesters who were staying in tents they had erected. .

The riot police used tear gas, batons, rubber bullets and shot guns to disperse the crowds. An eyewitness said that one battalion of the riot police fired shots from a bridge over the roundabout while another battalion was shooting from the opposite side, while the crowd was trying to seek refuge. Another eyewitness said: "The protesters are being attacked! Women and children are running around screaming and there is no where to run. Riot police are everywhere and are attacking from every corner. Many are wounded. There is a panic and chaos at the roundabout. Everyone is running and screaming."Ambulances were prevented from arriving at the Roundabout and several ambulance drivers were reported to have been beaten.

Those evicted from the Roundabout moved to the grounds of the al-Al-Salmaniya Hospital and were joined by others who swelled the numbers to several thousand.

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At least seven deaths have been confirmed and more than 200 people were injured, including some very seriously, since the attack on demonstrators on 14 February. In the afternoon of 18 February peaceful protesters again gathered a few hundreds metres away from the Pearl Roundabout. The army fired directly at the protesters, and a doctor in Al-Salmaniya hospital reported to the media that the hospital was full of seriously injured people and that fatally wounded patients were arriving with 'their brains blown out'.

