

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT

5 March 2014

Index: MDE 11/010/2014

Bahrain must not use killing of policemen to clamp down on freedoms

Amnesty International has today called on the Bahraini authorities to ensure those arrested following a blast that killed three policemen on Monday are not at risk of torture and other ill-treatment and to not use the attack to justify further clamp down on fundamental freedoms.

The call came after the Interior Ministry issued a statement on 4 March that it had arrested 25 individuals suspected in connection with the killing of three policemen on duty and that it has taken the necessary measures to track down others linked to the attack.

Amnesty International recognizes the Bahraini authorities' duty and responsibility to apprehend and bring to justice those responsible for the killing of the three policemen. It nevertheless urges the authorities to ensure those arrested are not subjected to acts of torture and ill-treatment while in custody and are given prompt access to a lawyer and family. If charged, they must be given a fair trial without recourse to the death penalty.

In many cases documented by Amnesty International, individuals arrested are often tortured or otherwise ill-treated during their first days or weeks in the custody of the security forces. Many are later tried unfairly and convicted on the basis of "confessions" extracted from them under torture.

The arrests of the 25 individuals were carried out during house raids mainly on the Shi'a villages of al-Daih and Sanabis. Amnesty International has obtained the names of 22 individuals, all of them males and many belong to the same families.

The security forces have reportedly been heavily deployed in al-Daih and Sanabis villages amidst fears amongst the inhabitants of further house raids and arrests.

Amnesty International is concerned about the recent escalation of violence, which has caused the death of at least four police officers and injuries to many protesters. Such violence often followed clashes between the security forces and protesters.

The blast on Monday in al-Daih, which killed three police officers, including one from the United Arab Emirates, is the second to take place in less than a month. On 14 February 2014, a police officer died following a bomb blast in the village of al-Dair.

The Monday blast took place after the funeral procession of Jaafar Mohamed Jaafar, aged 23, who died in hospital on 26 February where he was receiving treatment for sickle cell anaemia. His family alleged he died as a result of torture and ill-treatment in custody and lack of proper medical care. Amnesty International wrote to the Ministry of Interior expressing concerns about the death of Jaafar Mohamed Jaafar and called for an independent, thorough and impartial investigation.

Amnesty International is also concerned at measures announced during a government Cabinet meeting, which include requesting the Ministry of Justice and Islamic Affairs to monitor the “political societies, religious platforms and mosque preachers who advocate hatred, sectarianism and incite violence”. Such monitoring risks imposing further restrictions on the right to freedom of association and expression.

During the same Cabinet meeting, a decision was also issued to enlist as terrorist groups Saraya al-Ashtar (Al-Ashtar Brigades), which claimed responsibility for the attack on Monday, Saraya al-Muqawama (Resistance Brigades) as well as the 14 February Coalition and to arrest members of any other organisation or association linked to them.

In a separate incident, the headquarters of Al-Wefaq Society, the largest opposition group was attacked yesterday as thugs allegedly broke the gate to the building and an inside door. Members of National Democratic Action Society (Wa'ad) also received threats on Twitter on 3 February that their headquarters will also be attacked.

All major opposition groups in Bahrain publicly condemned Monday's killings.