

URGENT ACTION

15 YEARS' IMPRISONMENT FOR OPPOSITION ACTIVIST

Bahraini human rights activist Naji Fateel was sentenced to 15 years' imprisonment on 29 September on charges related to his involvement in the opposition youth movement known as the 14 February Coalition. He told the court that he had been tortured, and marks of torture were visible on his back.

Naji Fateel, a 39-year-old human rights defender, was sentenced to a 15-year prison sentence by Branch 4 of the High Criminal Court on 29 September. He was charged with, among other things, "setting up a terrorist group which aims to suspend the constitution and harm national unity". He was arrested at dawn on 2 May without a warrant at his home in the village of Bani Jamra, north-western Bahrain. He was held incommunicado for two days. He alleged that during his interrogation by the police he received electric shocks on sensitive parts of his body, was kicked and punched, and threatened with rape. His trial began on 11 July and he took off his shirt in court to reveal evidence of torture on his back.

Forty-nine others – including one woman – were sentenced in the same case on 29 September. They received prison terms ranging between five and 15 years after having been convicted for their involvement in the 14 February Coalition. The trial proceedings fell short of international standards, and resulted in all the defendants being convicted, most of them in their absence; torture allegations have not been investigated and were not considered by the court. The defendants are appealing against the verdicts.

Naji Fateel has been held in Dry Dock Prison since 5 May. He is also serving a prison sentence of six months issued against him on 22 May by the High Criminal Court for "illegal gathering". He was first arrested on 14 February 2012, the first anniversary of mass protests in Bahrain, during a peaceful march towards the al-Farouq Junction in Manama (formerly the Pearl Roundabout). He was released on bail on 17 April 2012.

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

- Expressing concern that Naji Fateel was sentenced to 15 years' imprisonment after grossly unfair trial proceedings;
- Urging them to order an immediate and independent investigation into his allegations of torture and bring anyone found responsible for abuses to justice;
- Urging them to release him unless his appeal trial excludes the admission of evidence extracted under torture and fully conforms to international fair trial standards.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 14 NOVEMBER 2013 TO:

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 1766 4587 (keep trying)
Salutation: Your Majesty

Minister of Interior

Shaikh Rashid bin 'Abdullah Al Khalifa
Ministry of Interior
P.O. Box 13, al-Manama, Bahrain
Fax: +973 1723 2661
Twitter: @moi_Bahrain
Salutation: Your Excellency

And copies to:

Minister of Justice and Islamic Affairs
Shaikh Khalid bin Ali bin Abdullah Al Khalifa
Ministry of Justice and Islamic Affairs
P. O. Box 450, al-Manama, Bahrain
Fax: +973 1753 1284
Email: minister@justice.gov.bh
Twitter: @Khaled_Bin_Ali

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 third update of UA 114/13. Further information: <http://amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE11/017/2013/en>

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Naji Fateel is a board member of the Bahrain Youth Society for Human Rights (BYSHR), as well as a blogger and prolific Twitter user, reporting on human rights violations. During marches and protests in villages he has given speeches about human rights and encouraged people to document and monitor violations.

Since 2011 Naji Fateel has been harassed and intimidated and has received death threats (please see this news story: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/news-and-updates/bahraini-activists-receive-threats-after-anonymous-death-call-2011-03-11> and previous Urgent Actions: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE11/016/2012/en>, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE11/011/2012/en>).

Two and a half years after the popular uprising in Bahrain, and beneath the fanfare of reform, prisoners of conscience, including some arrested during the protests, remain behind bars and the rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly continue to be suppressed. In recent months, not only have prisoners of conscience not been released, but more people have been jailed simply for daring to express their views, whether via Twitter or on peaceful marches. A number of women activists have been detained too. Bahraini courts have appeared more concerned with toeing the government's line than offering effective remedy to Bahrainis and upholding the rule of law.

The Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry (BICI), appointed by Royal Order on 29 June 2011, was charged with investigating and reporting on human rights violations committed in connection with the 2011 protests. At the launch of the BICI report in November 2011, the government publicly committed itself to implementing the recommendations set out in the report. The report recounted the government's response to the mass protests and documented wide-ranging human rights abuses. Among its key recommendations, the report called on the government to bring to account those responsible for human rights violations, including torture and excessive use of force, and carry out independent investigations into allegations of torture.

However, many of the government's pledges remain unfulfilled. The establishment of BICI and its report was considered to be a groundbreaking initiative, but almost two years on, the promise of meaningful reform has been betrayed by the government's unwillingness to implement key recommendations around accountability; this includes its failure to carry out independent, effective and transparent investigations into allegations of torture and other ill-treatment and excessive use of force, and to prosecute all those who gave the orders to commit human rights abuses. For further information see the report *Reform shelved, repression unleashed* (Index: MDE 11/062/2012), November 2012 (<http://amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE11/062/2012/en>).

On 28 July 2013 Bahrain's parliament held an extraordinary session and then submitted 22 recommendations to the king, Shaikh Hamad Bin 'Issa Al Khalifa. The recommendations toughen punishments laid out in the 2006 anti-terrorism law. A few days later the king issued several decrees curtailing the right to freedom of expression further, including banning all protests, sit-ins and public gatherings in Manama indefinitely and giving the security forces additional sweeping powers.

On 9 September 2013 a joint statement signed by 47 countries at the UN Human Rights Council expressed serious concern about the ongoing human rights violations in the country.

Name: Naji Fateel
Gender: m

Further information on UA: 114/13 MDE 11/047/2013 Issue Date: 3 October 2013

