

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT

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Bahrain must ensure accountability for child killed during a protest

Amnesty International today called on the Bahraini authorities to launch a prompt, thorough, independent and impartial investigation into the death of a boy who was reportedly shot by security forces as they were dispersing a protest. The organization has urged the Bahraini authorities to ensure the investigation is transparent, that its results are made public and that anyone found responsible is brought to justice.

Sayed Mahmood Sayed Mohsen, aged 14, died on 21 May following clashes with the security forces who used teargas and fired shotguns to disperse protesters in Sitra, south of the capital Manama, during a funeral procession of a man who died by a bomb blast last week. The family of Sayed Mohsen told Amnesty International that when they saw his body at the hospital it had injuries to his chest that appeared to have been caused by gunshot pellets. They were told he was pronounced dead upon arrival at the hospital. A copy of the death certificate obtained by the family states that the death of Sayed Mohsen was caused by shotgun pellet injuries to the lungs, heart and the bowels.

Shortly after the death of Sayed Mohsen, the Ministry of Interior announced on its website that the police were attacked with Molotov cocktails and iron rods during a riot following a funeral procession in Sitra.

While the specific circumstances in which Sayed Mohsen was shot remain unclear, the use of force in policing public assemblies, including those during which violence occurs, must conform to the requirements of necessity and proportionality; and firearms may only be used as a last resort – when strictly necessary to protect against the imminent threat of death or serious injury.

Amnesty International considers that the policing of assemblies should always be guided by human rights considerations. The fact that an assembly is illegal, or that minor violations of the law occur during a peaceful assembly, should not necessarily lead to a decision to disperse it. Similarly, where a small minority tries to turn a peaceful assembly into a violent one, police should ensure that those who are protesting peacefully are able to continue to do so, and not use the violent acts of a few as a pretext to restrict or impede the exercise of rights of a majority.

In the same statement, the Ministry of Interior announced that the Public Prosecution Office had launched an investigation into the death of a person brought to the Sitra health centre without naming Sayed Mohsen, raising concerns as to whether the investigation refers to the same person.

Amnesty International is concerned about the lack of transparency of investigations into cases of deaths during protests where results are often not made public. Abdulaziz al-Abbar, aged 27, died on 18 April after being hit on the head by a tear gas canister and shotgun pellets in February 2014. Amnesty International delegates met with members of Abdulaziz al-Abbar's family while on mission in Bahrain in May. His father told them he refused to receive Abdulaziz al-Abbar's body because the death certificate stated he died due to damage to the brain but did not mention any injuries from a tear gas canister and gunshot pellets to the head. The family has taken action before the public prosecution to have the cause of death corrected to allow them to receive the body of their son. News reports state the family is still waiting to receive his body. Amnesty International urges the authorities to publicly disclose whether they are conducting an investigation into his death.

The few cases in which police officers have been tried for killing protesters, either ended with acquittal or perpetrators receiving sentences that did not reflect the gravity of the violation. For the dozens of deaths that occurred during protests or in custody in 2011 only five policemen have so far been sentenced to between six months and three years in prison in relation to the killing of protesters or deaths in custody as a result of torture.

According to the UN Principles on the Effective Prevention and Investigation of Extra-Legal, Arbitrary and Summary Executions, states must conduct "thorough, prompt and impartial investigation of all suspected cases of extra-legal, arbitrary and summary executions, including cases where complaints by relatives or other reliable reports suggest unnatural death in the above circumstances." The Principles also require that "families of the deceased and their legal representatives shall be informed of, and have access to, any hearing as well as to all information relevant to the investigation" and "shall have the right to insist that a medical or other qualified representative be present at the autopsy." Furthermore, "[t]he families and dependents of victims of extra-legal, arbitrary or summary executions shall be entitled to fair and adequate compensation within a reasonable period of time."

Amnesty International urges the authorities to launch prompt, thorough and impartial investigations into all cases of torture and other ill-treatment, deaths during protests and deaths in custody, make the results public and bring those responsible to justice in fair trials. The organization renews its call on the government to demonstrate concretely its commitment to upholding human rights by ensuring that the security forces adhere strictly to international standards on the use of force and firearms and by ensuring justice and reparation for victims of human rights violations and their families.