



HM. King Hamad bin Isa Al-Khalifa
Office of the King
The Amiri Court
Rifa'a Palace
The Kingdom of Bahrain

Your Majesty,

CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation an international alliance of civil society in over 100 countries and the Bahrain Center for Human Rights (BCHR) are deeply concerned about the use of military courts to stifle civil society. Of particular concern is the sentencing of 20 medical doctors for 5 to 15 years in prison on 29 September 2011 on unproven charges including occupying the Salmanya Medical Complex, calling for the overthrow of the regime and spreading false information. We are also concerned by the harsh sentences of 14 opposition leaders and human rights defenders on 28 September 2011 as well as the sentencing of two Teachers' Association leaders on 25 September 2011 to long prison term on unsubstantiated charges of disrupting schooling, broadcasting false news and threatening national security. We believe that these harsh sentences are solely rooted in these individuals expressing solidarity with the popular protest movement in Bahrain and denouncing human rights violations. CIVICUS and BCHR therefore urge the Bahrain Government to free all civilians unjustly convicted by military courts and end the persecution of civil society.

The medical doctors were sentenced by the Bahrain Safety Court, a military body in grave violation of internationally acceptable principles of medical neutrality which uphold medical professionals' unhindered and non-discriminatory approach to treating the wounded. It is not a crime for medics to treat the wounded protesters or to tell of the brutal assaults on civilians they have witnessed. Rather the prosecution and conviction of these doctors for abiding by their medical obligations only demonstrates a political intent to intimidate and

instill fear so as to silence medics and all others who witness human rights violations.

Many physicians and nurses were ripped from their homes and hospitals by masked security forces and subjected to torture and degrading treatment. For instance Ms. Zahra Al-Sammak was forced to leave her child alone in the middle of the night and Dr. Ali El-Ekri was snatched from the operating room while performing surgery at Salmaniaya Hospital on 17 March in total disregard to the risk to the life of the patient involved. By proceeding with the harsh sentencing of medical professionals apparently because of their faithful execution of their oath and ethical duty to treat and care for patients at all times, the Bahrain Government has violated its obligation to protect its citizens including the Second Additional Protocol to the Geneva Conventions of 1949 explicitly prevents states from punishing any person carrying out medical activities compatible with medical ethics.

The military court has also upheld harsh sentences ranging up to life imprisonment against 14 prominent human rights activists and opposition leaders on 28 September 2011. Seven others who were either in hiding in Bahrain or living outside Bahrain were also sentenced in absentia in June 2011 and have had no chance to appeal the long sentences against them unless they subject themselves to arrest by presenting themselves to the military court. The recent military court action followed the activists' announcement for an open hunger strike from prison in Gurayn military prison on 24 September 2011 to express solidarity with the pro-democracy movement, protest the brutal crackdown on demonstrators and demand for the immediate release of women who were arrested in the protests.

Two leaders of the Teachers' Association of Bahrain, Mr. Mahdi 'Issa Mahdi Abu Dheeb and Ms. Jalila al-Salman were also sentenced by the same military court . They were held in detention for nearly five months and subjected to ill-treatment, torture, harassment and abuse. While Ms. Jalila was released on bail on 21 August 2011, Mr. Mahdi Issa Mahdi remains imprisoned since his arrest in April 2011 for expressing their opinions and exercising their rights to peacefully assemble and associate. Recently, more members of the Teachers' Association of Bahrain are being summoned for trial at the criminal court of Bahrain for the same reason.

The situation of civil society in Bahrain remains life-threatening ever since the violent crackdown on peaceful demonstrators in February of this year and the Bahraini security forces have continued to harass and raid homes of civil society activists and health care workers. We denounces this state of intimidation as a grave violation of the international human rights standards the Bahrain Government has ratified to defend and protect the human rights of all people of Bahrain. CIVICUS and BCHR therefore call upon your Majesty to:

1. Overturn the sentences of all medical workers, opposition politicians, leaders of teachers association and human rights activists convicted by military courts and unconditionally release all those in prison;
2. Stop further harassment of more members of the teachers' association and medical workers with summons of trial at the criminal courts of Bahrain.
3. Abolish the martial law that gives illegal powers to the military's commander-in-chief to violently suppress peaceful protesters, search homes of civil society activists, engage in limitless surveillance, and arbitrarily detain and try civilians in military courts;
4. Abolish the decree that outlaws trade unions, political and nongovernmental organizations, and newspapers;
5. Guarantee the freedoms of association and assembly; and
6. Seek peaceful means to engage and respond to the demands of the demonstrators.

Sincerely,



SECRETARY GENERAL

Ingrid Srinath
Secretary General
CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation



Nabeel Rajab
President
Bahrain Center for Human Rights