

URGENT ACTION

LIFE SENTENCE FOR BAHRAINI OPPOSITION LEADER

On 4 November 2018, the Bahraini Appeal Court sentenced opposition leader and prisoner of conscience, Sheikh Ali Salman, to life imprisonment. The court overturned an earlier acquittal, and convicted him and two others of communicating sensitive security information to Qatar.

On 4 November 2018, the High Criminal Court of Appeal in Manama, Bahrain's capital, sentenced Sheikh Ali Salman, the Secretary General of al-Wefaq National Islamic Society (al-Wefaq), Bahrain's main opposition party, to life imprisonment. He was convicted with two others of "exchanging intelligence information with a foreign country [Qatar] and with those serving its interests to carry out hostile acts against Bahrain, as well as to harm its military, political and economic standing and undermine its national interests" and "delivering and divulging defence secrets to a foreign country, disseminating tendentious news and statements about the internal situation in Bahrain for the sake of undermining its prestige and status". The two other men, Ali al-Aswad, a former al-Wefaq Member of Parliament, and Sheikh Hassan Sultan, a party member whose nationality was revoked in January 2015, were tried in absentia.

Sheikh Ali Salman is held in Jaw Prison, south of Manama. He was due for release at the end of December, having served his four-year prison sentence in another case relating to his peaceful speeches.

The trial of the three men started on 27 November 2017. On 21 June 2018, a court of First Instance acquitted them, but the Public Prosecution appealed the verdict. The charges were based on recorded telephone conversations that took place in 2011 between Sheikh Ali Salman and the then Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the State of Qatar, Sheikh Hamad Bin Jassim Bin Jabr Al-Thani, who had been suggested by the US government as a possible mediator during the 2011 uprising.

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

- Urging the Bahraini authorities to release Sheikh Ali Salman immediately and unconditionally, as he is a prisoner of conscience, held solely for peacefully exercising his right to freedom of expression and ensure that his convictions and sentences are quashed;
- Urging them to uphold the right to freedom of expression and repeal or amend all laws that criminalize the peaceful exercise of the rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 17 DECEMBER 2018:

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

Salutation: Your Majesty

Minister of Justice and Islamic Affairs

Shaikh Khalid bin Ali Al Khalifa
Ministry of Justice and Islamic Affairs
P. O. Box 450, al-Manama, Bahrain
Fax: +973 1753 1284
E-form: <http://www.moj.gov.bh/en/>
Twitter: @Khaled_Bin_Ali

Salutation: Your Excellency

And copies to:

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

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. His Excellency Shaikh Fawaz bin Mohammed Al Khalifa, Embassy of the Kingdom of Bahrain, 30 Belgrave Square, London, SW1X 8QB, Tel: 0207 201 9170, Fax 020 7201 9183, Email:

information@bahrainembassy.co.uk or through the online contact form at <http://www.bahrainembassy.co.uk/>

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date. This is the tenth update of UA 22/15. Further information:

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde11/6068/2017/en/>

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Sheikh Ali Salman is al-Wefaq's Secretary General. He was first arrested on 28 December 2014, in relation to speeches he had made in 2012 and 2014, including his speech at the party's General Assembly meeting two days earlier, on 26 December, in which he spoke about the opposition's continuing determination to reach power in Bahrain, to achieve the demands of the 2011 uprising through peaceful means and to hold those responsible for committing human rights abuses to account. He also highlighted the need for equality for all Bahrainis. His arrest took place a few days after he was re-elected to a fourth term as Secretary General of al-Wefaq.

Sheikh Ali Salman was sentenced on 16 June 2015, after an unfair trial, to four years in prison; two years for "public incitement to loathing and contempt of a sect of people which will result in disrupting public order" and "publicly insulting the Interior Ministry", and another two years for "publicly inciting others to disobey the law", and acquitted of "incitement to the promotion of the change of the political system by force, threats and other illegal means". In September 2015, the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention called on the Bahraini authorities to release Sheikh Ali Salman immediately and to grant him adequate compensation.

On 30 May 2016, the Court of Appeal upheld his conviction and extended his prison sentence from four to nine years, thus reversing his earlier acquittal. His appeal was marred by irregularities, including violations to the right to adequate time and facilities to prepare a defence. On 3 April 2017, the Court of Cassation reduced the nine-year prison sentence to four years.

In parallel, on 14 June 2016, following an urgent hearing, the High Administrative Court had ordered the suspension of Bahrain's main opposition party, al-Wefaq, and the seizure of its assets. On 17 July 2016, the court dissolved al-Wefaq, and the party lost its appeal on 22 September 2016. Meanwhile, on 20 June 2016, al-Wefaq's spiritual leader, Sheikh Isa Qassem, was stripped of his nationality.

Further information on UA: 22/15 Index: MDE 11/9363/2018 Issue Date: 5 November 2018

