
Amnesty International

MONTHLY ACTION

ACTIVISM TEAM, Amnesty International UK
HRAC, 17-25 New Inn Yard, London EC2A 3EA



May 2013

Individuals At Risk

Mahdi 'Issa Mahdi Abu Dheeb, Bahrain

Mahdi 'Issa Mahdi Abu Dheeb, former President of the Bahrain Teachers' Association (BTA), has been in prison since his arrest on 6 April 2011. Mahdi 'Issa Mahdi Abu Dheeb's family did not know where he was for 24 days. He spent 64 days in solitary confinement during which he says he was tortured. His family and lawyer were only allowed to see him during the first session of his trial before a military court on 7 June 2011. He was sentenced with Jalila al-Salman, former Vice-president of the BTA, on 25 September 2011 before the military National Safety Court, to 10 years in prison. Both were convicted for using their positions to call for a strike by teachers, halting the educational process, inciting hatred of the regime, attempting to overthrow the ruling system by force, possessing pamphlets and disseminating fabricated stories and information, among other charges. Neither of them advocated violence during the protests and Amnesty has not seen any convincing evidence supporting such accusations, nor was there any such evidence presented at trial.

No investigation into their allegations of torture and other ill-treatment is known to have taken place and the results made public when the appeal verdict was announced. His appeal before a civilian court started on 11 December 2011 and on 21 October 2012 the High Criminal Court of Appeal in Manama upheld their convictions but reduced Jalila al-Salman's sentence to six months in prison and Mahdi 'Issa Mahdi Abu Dheeb's sentence to five years in prison. Amnesty International considers Mahdi Abu Dheeb to be a prisoner of conscience.

What you need to do:

Please read the background briefing and sign the enclosed appeal letter on behalf of your group. Please also be sure to send us copies of any responses.

Please post or email your letter to:

Alice Thomas Yusuf Samaan, Ambassador
Embassy of the Kingdom of Bahrain
30 Belgrave Square, London SW1X 8QB

Salutation: Your Excellency

Email: information@bahrainembassy.co.uk

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GOT QUERIES OR WANT TO DO MORE?

For any queries about this action and for updates, please contact shane.enright@amnesty.org.uk, or visit www.amnesty.org/tradeunions
Download this mailing at www.amnesty.org.uk/groups

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Background information

Amnesty International calls for freedom of association for Bahrain teachers

Mahdi 'Issa Mahdi Abu Dheeb, former President of the Bahrain Teachers' Association (BTA), was arrested on 6 April 2011 after a raid on his uncle's house. Both he and his uncle were arrested; his uncle was released 72 days later. Mahdi 'Issa Mahdi Abu Dheeb's family did not know where he was for 24 days. He spent 64 days in solitary confinement during which he says he was tortured. His family and lawyer were only allowed to see him during the first session of his trial before a military court on 7 June 2011. Mahdi 'Issa Mahdi Abu Dheeb has remained in prison since his arrest. He was sentenced with Jalila al-Salman, former Vice-president of the BTA, on 25 September 2011 before the military National Safety Court, to 10 years in prison.

His appeal before a civilian court started on 11 December 2011 and on 21 October 2012 the High Criminal Court of Appeal in Manama upheld their convictions but reduced Jalila al-Salman's sentence to six months in prison and Mahdi 'Issa Mahdi Abu Dheeb's sentence to five years in prison. Jalila al-Salman had already spent five and a half months in prison and Mahdi 'Issa Mahdi Abu Dheeb over 18 months. At the time the verdict was announced Mahdi 'Issa Mahdi Abu Dheeb was already serving his sentence in Jaw prison. No investigation into their allegations of torture and other ill-treatment is known to have taken place and the results made public when the appeal verdict was announced. Both were convicted for using their positions to call for a strike by teachers, halting the educational process, inciting hatred of the regime, attempting to overthrow the ruling system by force, possessing pamphlets and disseminating fabricated stories and information, among other charges. Neither of them advocated violence during the protests and Amnesty has not seen any convincing evidence supporting such accusations, nor was there any such evidence presented at trial. The organization considers them to be prisoners of conscience imprisoned solely for exercising their rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly and therefore they should be immediately and unconditionally released.

Bahrain is one of the few countries in the Gulf to have a tradition of independent trade unions. These trade unions are non-sectarian and cross the Shia and Sunni communities. Defending the right of workers' to organise is crucial for the global unions and Bahrain is a priority country of concern for the both the International Trade Union Confederation and the 30-million strong teachers' federation Education International.

In the UK, the TUC and teacher's trade unions have been especially supportive of our activism in support of Mahdi Abu Dheeb and the Bahrain Teachers' Association. Over the Easter weekend this year, more than 300 teacher delegates at the conferences of the NUT and NASUWT took part in a photo solidarity action calling for Mahdi to be freed. The plight of the BTA also featured in an SMS Pocket Protest in November 2012 when over 3000 appeals were sent to the Ambassador in London.

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Background information

Amnesty International calls for freedom of association for Bahrain teachers

BAHRAIN FACTFILE

At least 72 people have been killed since protests broke out in February 2011.

Amnesty has adopted 20 individuals as prisoners of conscience - 14 have been in prison since they were arrested in 2011 and the rest were imprisoned in 2012.

At least 80 children are held in adult prisons in Bahrain for participating in protests.

Thirteen imprisoned opposition leaders, activists and prisoners of conscience lost their final court appeal this year and stand convicted of terrorism charges due to their role in the 2011 uprisings.

Of 96 official investigations of deaths in custody and during protests since 2011, 46 cases have been dismissed due to lack of evidence of a crime, or because the death was said to have been caused by "an act of legitimate self defence". Seventeen police officers have been tried or are currently undergoing trials in cases related to the protests. Eight have been acquitted and six have been convicted and sentenced.

Salah Abbas Habib Ahmad Mousa, a 36-year old protestor, was shot dead by security forces during demonstrations at last year's Grand Prix. Last week his family heard that a low-ranking policeman was charged with his killing on 8 April and a hearing is due to begin on 6 May. However, the victim's family and their lawyer have been given no access to any details of the investigation and there are concerns that the move is designed to deflect criticism.

Two people died this February during demonstrations marking the second anniversary of the uprising after being shot by riot police.

In June 2011 the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry was established by the country's authorities to investigate abuses during the 2011 unrest. It issued its report in November 2011, finding the Bahraini government responsible for gross human rights violations. But at least 26 individuals have died in protests since the report was released.

According to the NGO Bahrain Watch, the Bahraini government has recently spent at least £21 million on public relations firms to improve its image.

For recent Amnesty International research on Bahrain, see:

'Freedom has a price': Two years after Bahrain's uprising (14 February 2013):

http://www.amnesty.org.uk/news_details.asp?NewsID=20635

'Bahrain: reform shelved, repression unleashed' (21 November 2012)

http://www.amnesty.org.uk/news_details.asp?NewsID=20459

For International trade union research on freedom of association and workers' rights in Bahrain see:

http://www.ei-ie.org/en/websections/content_detail/6411

<http://survey.ituc-csi.org/Bahrain.html>

Alice Thomas Yusuf Samaan,
Ambassador
Embassy of the Kingdom of Bahrain
30 Belgrave Square
London SW1X 8QB
United Kingdom,

Date

Your Excellency,

Please release Mahdi 'Issa Mahdi Abu Dheeb, former President of the Bahrain Teachers' Association (BTA) and other jailed prisoners of conscience

We are gravely concerned about the imprisonment of Mr Abu Dheeb, the former President of the Bahrain teachers' Association. He was convicted for using his position to call for a strike by teachers, halting the educational process, inciting hatred of the regime, attempting to overthrow the ruling system by force, possessing pamphlets and disseminating fabricated stories and information, among other charges. He did not advocate violence during the protests and Amnesty has not seen any convincing evidence supporting such accusations, nor was there any such evidence presented at trial.

We are also very worried that complaints that he was tortured and faced other ill-treatment while held in solitary confinement have not been investigated.

We consider Mahdi Abu Dheeb to be a prisoner of conscience imprisoned solely for exercising his rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly and therefore he should be immediately and unconditionally released.

We are also gravely concerned to learn that his case is not unique, and there are other prisoners of conscience in similar situations who should also be immediately released.

We would appreciate a response to this letter

Yours sincerely