

Youth Urgent Action



WHERE: Bahrain
WHO: Teacher: Mahdi 'Issa Abu Dheeb
WHAT: Violation of the rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly

CASE OVERVIEW



Mahdi 'Issa Mahdi Abu Dheeb is a teacher in Bahrain and the former President of the Bahrain Teachers' Association. He was arrested on April 6th 2011 after a raid on his uncle's house. His family did not know where he was for 24 days. Mahdi spent 64 days in solitary confinement* during which he says he was tortured before he was put on trial. He claims he was forced to sign a confession that he didn't even get the chance to read.

On September 25th 2011 he was sentenced to 10 years in prison. He was convicted for using his position as a trade union leader to call for a teachers strike*, stopping the education process, inciting* hatred of the regime, attempting to overthrow the ruling system by force, possessing pamphlets and making up and spreading stories and information.

Amnesty International has not seen any convincing evidence supporting these accusations, nor was there any evidence for them presented at his trial. No investigation is known to have been carried out into his allegations of torture. Amnesty believes Mahdi is a prisoner of conscience*, detained for peacefully exercising his right to expression, association and assembly*. Mahdi should be immediately and unconditionally released.

BACKGROUND

In early 2011, as peaceful protests spread across Bahrain, Mahdi 'Issa Mahdi Abu Dheeb and his colleague Jalila al-Salman called for a teachers' strike to support the growing demands for improvements to the human rights situation in Bahrain. By April, both of them were detained.

Having won the right to appeal on October 21st 2012 the appeal court upheld the guilty verdict but their prison sentences were reduced – Mahdi's to five years, Jalila to six months. Jalila has since been released from prison but Mahdi remains behind bars.

(see *Glossary)



'Mama's tears are heart-breaking...563 days were hard... 5 years a nightmare'

Watch a short clip of Mahdi's daughter responding to her father's five year sentence: www.amnesty.org.uk/mahdi

Trade Unions

Mahdi Abu Dheeb is the former president of a Trade Union called the Bahrain Teachers' Association. A Trade Union is an organisation that represents the people who work in a particular industry, protects their rights, and discusses their pay and working conditions with employers.

Trade unionists are ordinary men and women and are often at the forefront of the struggle for human rights. Many have lost their lives or risked their freedom because of their demands for basic human rights such as freedom of association and freedom of speech.

As a result, they are often targets of government repression. They have to deal with their organisations being banned, harassment, political killings and 'disappearances', arbitrary detention, torture and murder.

UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

Mahdi has had many of his rights abused – here are just a few examples from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights:

Article 19:

Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression, and to seek, receive and impart information: We all have the right to make up our minds, think what we want, to say what we like, and nobody should forbid us from doing so.

Article 20:

Everyone has the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association. We all have the right to organise peaceful meetings freely or to take part in meetings in a peaceful way.

Article 23:

Everyone has the right to form and join trade unions for the protection of their interests.

GLOSSARY

Incite: encourage or stir up

Freedom of association and assembly:

the right of a person to join with other people, for example, as a union, to defend their rights.

Solitary Confinement: a punishment in which someone is kept in a room alone, usually in prison.

Strike: to refuse to continue working because of an argument with an employer about working conditions, pay levels, or job losses. In this case the strike was targeted at the Government in order to demand improvements to the human rights situation in the country.

Prisoner of Conscience: A person imprisoned because of their political, religious or other beliefs, ethnic origin, sex, colour, language, national origin, economic status, birth, sexual orientation who has not used violence or advocated violence or hatred. Amnesty insists that all prisoners of conscience be set free at once and without conditions.

MORE INFORMATION

Amnesty International annual report Bahrain:

<http://www.amnesty.org/en/region/bahrain/report-2012>

Information on Amnesty International UK's work on Trade Unions:

<http://www.amnesty.org.uk/tradeunions>

TURN THE PAGE TO TAKE ACTION FOR MAHDI →

TAKE ACTION: Get your teachers involved

Ask teachers to show support for fellow teacher, Mahdi. This action provides a great opportunity to do outreach to teachers who may not have had contact with your youth group before.

1. Send us photos

Ask teachers in your school to have their photo taken holding messages of support such as:

- Free Mahdi Abu Dheeb
- Mahdi has the right to freedom of expression
- Mahdi has a right to freedom of peaceful association

You could ask them to write their own or prepare messages in advance.



Christine Blower, General Secretary of the National Union of Teachers. (NUT), May 2013.

2. Write Messages on a blackboard

Important: Let your teachers know that if they are having their photo taken they are giving permission for Amnesty to use their photos, for example on our website or in our publications.

If teachers prefer not to have their photo taken ask them to write their messages on the “blackboard” template attached instead. We realise that most of you no longer use blackboards! However, it still retains a symbolic link to teaching.

Simply photocopy the “blackboard” and ask teachers to write a message on it. We found a white oil –pastel worked best (crayon, chalk or pencils may work too) so ask your art department for supplies. Feel free to adapt this action as creatively as you like!

We will send messages and photos on to the Bahraini authorities.

Send your photos or messages to Anne Montague, The Human Rights Action Centre, 17-25 New Inn Yard, London, EC2A 3EA or email student@amnesty.org.uk

Deadline: End of term

Note: Students can of course take part in the action too!

Amnesty International
PROTECT THE HUMAN

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