

URGENT ACTION

ONE-YEAR PRISON SENTENCE UPHELD FOR ACTIVIST

Bahraini activist Dr Sa'eed al-Samahiji had his one-year prison sentence upheld on appeal on 7 September. He had been convicted of charges including "insulting a brotherly state" and "calling for illegal demonstrations". He is a prisoner of conscience.

Bahraini activist **Dr Sa'eed Muthafer Habib al-Samahiji** had his one-year prison sentence upheld by Branch Two of the Appeal Court in Manama, the capital, on 7 September. He had been convicted of charges including "insulting a brotherly state [Saudi Arabia]", "publicly inciting to non-compliance with the laws and institutions in Bahrain" and "publicly calling for participation in unlicensed demonstrations and marches" on his Twitter account. During his trial he denied all the charges. He is currently held in Jaw Prison, about 30km south of Manama.

Dr Sa'eed al-Samahiji was arrested at his house on 3 January 2016 for disseminating information about the execution of prominent Saudi Shi'a cleric Sheikh Nimr al-Nimr and insulting the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia on Twitter. His trial began on 31 January and was postponed several times. He went on hunger strike between 14 February and 31 March in protest at his treatment in Dry Dock Prison, which, he said, included being threatened and insulted by prison wardens for asking his family to bring him a book on first aid and being separated from his family by a glass barrier during visits. He was taken to the prison clinic shortly after he began his hunger strike, but refused to eat. During his hunger strike, his weight dropped by about 20kg. He was sentenced to one year in prison on 7 April and transferred to Jaw Prison on 10 April.

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

- Calling on the authorities to quash Dr Sa'eed al-Samahiji's conviction and release him immediately and unconditionally as he is a prisoner of conscience, imprisoned solely for peacefully exercising his right to freedom of expression;
- Calling on them to ensure that he is protected from any torture or other ill-treatment and that he receives any medical attention he may require;
- Urging them to repeal laws that criminalize the peaceful exercise of the right to freedom of expression, in line with Bahrain's obligations under Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 24 OCTOBER 2016 TO:

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

Ministry of Interior

Shaikh Rashid bin 'Abdullah Al Khalifa
P.O. Box 13, al-Manama
Bahrain
Fax: +973 1723 2661
Email: info@interior.gov.bh
Twitter: @moi_Bahrain

Salutation: Your Excellency

And copies to:

Minister of Justice and Islamic Affairs
Shaikh Khaled bin Ali bin Abdullah Al
Khalifa

Ministry of Justice and Islamic Affairs
P.O. Box 450, al-Manama, Bahrain
Fax: +973 1753 1284

Email (via website):
<http://www.moj.gov.bh/en/default76a7.html?action=category&ID=159>
Twitter: @Khaled_Bin_Ali

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, Email: information@bahrainembassy.co.uk
Salutation: Your Excellency

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date. This is the third update of UA 3/16. Further information:
<https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/MDE11/3845/2016/en/>

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Dr Sa'eed Mothaher Habib al-Samahiji, an ophthalmologist, was arrested by police on 3 January at his home in 'Issa town, around 15km south of Manama. They searched his home and confiscated his electronic devices. The Public Prosecution published a statement the next day about the seven-day detention of a person accused of "misusing electronic networks to insult a brotherly nation and inciting unlicensed demonstrations which led to demonstrations accompanied by violent acts". The Ministry of Interior had announced on its website on 2 January that Articles 168 and 215 of Bahrain's Penal Code would apply when taking legal action against anyone attempting to use "the recent verdicts in Saudi Arabia" (possibly referring to the execution of Sheikh Nimr al-Nimr, which had been announced that day) to heighten sectarian tensions or to incite violence.

Articles 168 and 215 of Bahrain's Penal Code state that any person who, respectively, deliberately disseminates false reports, statements or malicious rumours, or publicly offends a foreign country or an international organization based in the state of Bahrain or its president or representative, shall be sentenced to imprisonment for a period of no more than two years and a fine not exceeding 200 Bahraini dinars (US\$ 539) or either of these punishments.

Dr Sa'eed al-Samahiji had previously been arrested after he gave a short speech that was filmed in September 2013 at the funeral of 22-year-old demonstrator Sadeq Sabt, who had died in Salmaniya Medical Complex a month after being run over by a police car during a demonstration on 30 July 2013. Dr Sa'eed al-Samahiji was convicted under Articles 92/2 and 214 of Bahrain's Penal Code of "publicly insulting the King of Bahrain" and sentenced in December 2013 to one year in prison. In April 2014 the High Court of Appeal upheld his sentence. On 1 July 2014 he was arrested to serve his sentence in Jaw Prison. He was released on 1 July 2015 having served his sentence.

Dr Sa'eed al-Samahiji was one of a group of health professionals from the Salmaniya Medical Complex who were arrested in early 2011 for participating in mass anti-government protests and for being vocal in interviews with foreign media and accusing the government of gross violations against protesters. All were held incommunicado for several months. Dr Sa'eed al-Samahiji was sentenced to one year in prison for "kidnapping for a terrorist purpose", "illegal gathering and participating in unlicensed marches" and "instigating hatred against another sect", which was upheld by the Court of Cassation in Manama on 1 October 2012. He was released on 24 April 2013.

He told Amnesty International that during his arrest in 2011 he was tortured and otherwise ill-treated, including by being beaten on the head, legs and kidney area, and that he still had problems due to this.

After reviewing legal documents and evidence, Amnesty International found no evidence that Dr Sa'eed al-Samahiji or any of the health professionals arrested had used or advocated violence during the 2011 pro-reform demonstrations, and considered them prisoners of conscience, jailed only for exercising their rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly.

Name: Dr Sa'eed Mothaher Habib al-Samahiji
Gender m/f: m

Further information on UA: 3/16 Index: MDE 11/4805/2016 Issue Date: 12 September 2016