

URGENT ACTION

ACTIVIST'S PRISON SENTENCE REDUCED TO 3 YEARS

On 26 October the five years prison sentence against political activist and prisoner of conscience Fadhel Abbas Mahdi Mohamed was reduced to three years by Bahrain's High Court of Appeals. He was convicted with "spreading false information that could damage military operations of Bahrain and its allies and calling for resistance".

On 26 October the High Court of Appeals in Manama, the capital of Bahrain, issued its verdict in the case against **Fadhel Abbas Mahdi Mohamed**, the former Secretary General of the Unitary National Democratic Assemblage, an opposition political party also known as al-Wahdawi party. The court reduced his prison sentence from five to three years. He remains held in Jaw Prison, south of Manama.

Fadhel Abbas was sentenced by the High Criminal Court in Manama to five years in prison on 28 June 2015 for "spreading false information that could damage military operations of Bahrain and its allies and calling for resistance" after his party said that the Saudi Arabia-led air strikes in Yemen were a violation of international law. His first appeal hearing took place in his absence on 11 October 2015 and, later on, court sessions were postponed several times.

Amnesty International believes that Fadhel Abbas has been sentenced solely for exercising his right to freedom of expression and has not used or advocated violence.

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

- Calling on the Bahraini authorities to release Fadhel Abbas Mahdi Mohamed immediately and unconditionally, as he is a prisoner of conscience, held solely for peacefully exercising his right to freedom of expression;
- Urging them to repeal or amend 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 9 DECEMBER 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: (via website)
www.interior.gov.bh/contact_en.aspx
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
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, Fax 020 7201 9183, Email: information@bahrainembassy.co.uk or through the online contact form at <http://www.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: 142/15. Further information: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde11/4830/2016/en/>

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Fadhel Abbas was arrested on 26 March 2015, after his opposition political party, the Unitary National Democratic Assemblage and also known as al-Wahdawi party, said that the Saudi Arabia-led air strikes in Yemen were a violation of international law. The same day the Ministry of Interior announced Bahrain's support for the Saudi Arabia-led coalition in Yemen and issued a statement warning that the government would take steps against any "attempt to exploit the situation through division or sedition, or issuance of statements against the approach Bahrain has taken".

His trial before the High Criminal Court in Manama started on 27 April 2015 and he pleaded not guilty during the first session. He was sentenced on 28 June to five years in prison for "spreading false information that could damage military operations of Bahrain and its allies and calling for resistance". Fadhel Abbas was not brought to his first appeal hearing, which took place on 11 October 2015. On 28 June 2016, the Appeal Court scheduled 26 October as the date on which it will issue its verdict.

Fadhel Abbas was convicted less than two weeks after another prominent opposition leader, Sheikh 'Ali Salman, the Secretary General of the al-Wefaq National Islamic Society, was sentenced by the High Criminal Court, after an unfair trial, to four years in prison for "public incitement to loathing and contempt of a sect of people which will result in disrupting public order", "publicly insulting the Interior Ministry" and "publicly inciting others to disobey the law". These charges related to statements he had made in speeches in 2012 and 2014, including his speech at the party's General Assembly meeting on 26 December 2014 when he referred to the refusal of the opposition in Bahrain to follow the approach of the Syrian opposition and turn the country into a military battleground. He also highlighted the need for equality for all Bahrainis, including the ruling family. On 30 May 2016 the Appeal Court in Manama upheld his conviction and extended his prison sentence from four to nine years, thus reversing his earlier acquittal on the charge of "incitement to the promotion of the change of the political system by force, threats and other illegal means". His appeal had been pending for eight months and was marred by irregularities.

Article 133 of the Bahraini Penal Code punishes with up to 10 years in prison anyone who "deliberately announces in wartime false or malicious news, statements or rumours or mounts adverse publicity campaigns, so as to cause damage to military preparations for defending the State of Bahrain or military operations of the Armed Forces, to cause people to panic or to weaken the nation's perseverance".

Since May 2016 Bahrain has seen an alarming intensification in the crackdown on the enjoyment of the rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly, association and movement, particularly against the political opposition and those critical of the authorities. Nabeel Rajab, the prominent human rights defender and president of the Bahrain Centre for Human Rights, was arrested on 13 June. The next day the al-Wefaq National Islamic Society was suspended by the High Administrative Court and, on 20 June, its spiritual leader, Sheikh Isa Qasem, was stripped of his nationality. Five activists including human rights defenders were prevented from leaving Bahrain to attend the June session of the UN Human Rights Council. The vice-president of the Bahrain Teacher's Association was prevented from travelling to Oslo in June to take part in the Arthur Svensson award ceremony. More travel bans were imposed and at least 60 Shi'a clerics were summoned for interrogation over protests held in the village of Duraz since 20 June against the stripping of their spiritual leader's nationality; the majority were charged with "illegal gathering".

Further information on UA: 142/15 Index: MDE 11/5063/2016 Issue Date: 28 October 2016