

URGENT ACTION

FREED PRISONER OF CONSCIENCE BACK IN COURT

Bahraini prisoner of conscience Ebrahim Sharif was released from Jaw prison having served a one-year prison sentence over a peaceful speech he made in July 2015. The prosecution have appealed the verdict and he is due back in court on 13 October.

Bahraini political activist **Ebrahim Sharif** was released from Jaw prison, south-eastern Bahrain, on 11 July. He had served a one-year prison sentence imposed on him on 24 February by the High Criminal Court in the capital, Manama, where he was convicted of “incitement to hatred and contempt of the regime” but acquitted of “incitement to overthrow the regime by force and illegal means”. Both charges related solely to a peaceful speech he made in July 2015, and he has not used or advocated violence. Amnesty International considered him a prisoner of conscience.

The prosecution appealed against the one-year sentence imposed for “incitement to hatred and contempt of the regime” and the acquittal of the second charge of “incitement to overthrow the regime by force and illegal means”. As a result, under Articles 160 and 165 of the Bahraini Penal Code, Ebrahim Sharif could now face up to 13 years in prison if convicted on both charges. His trial before the Appeal Court began on 31 May and the next hearing is scheduled for 13 October.

In his speech in July 2015, which Amnesty International has seen, Ebrahim Sharif spoke about the need for change in Bahrain, highlighted the political opposition’s commitment to non-violence and urged the government to introduce key economic reforms to avoid further bankruptcy. If he is imprisoned again in relation to this speech, Amnesty International would consider him to be a prisoner of conscience.

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

- Calling on the Bahraini authorities to ensure Ebrahim Sharif’s conviction is quashed and any ongoing proceedings against him are halted if they stem solely from the peaceful exercise of his right to freedom of expression;
- Urging them to uphold the right to freedom of expression and repeal or amend laws that criminalize the peaceful exercise of the rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 7 SEPTEMBER 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

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

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
Email via website:

<http://www.moj.gov.bh/en/>
Twitter: @Khaled_Bin_Ali

And copies to:

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Please insert local diplomatic addresses below:

His Excellency Shaikh Fawaz bin Mohammed Al Khalifa, Embassy of the Kingdom of Bahrain, 30 Belgrave Square, London, SW1X 8QB
Fax 020 7201 9183 Email information@bahrainembassy.co.uk Salutation Your Excellency

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date. This is the fourth update of UA 168/15. Further information:
<https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde11/3525/2016/en/>

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Ebrahim Sharif is the former Secretary General of the National Democratic Action Society (Wa'ad), a secular political opposition party in Bahrain which includes people from both Shi'a and Sunni communities. He was arrested at his home on 12 July 2015 at 2.30am and taken to the Criminal Investigations Directorate (CID) where he was questioned about a speech he had made at a public gathering on 10 July which did not use or advocate violence. He was remanded in custody for 48 hours. He was brought to the Public Prosecution for interrogation on 13 July on charges of "incitement to hatred and contempt of the regime" and "incitement to overthrow the regime by force and illegal means", under Articles 165 and 160 of Bahrain's Penal Code, which Ebrahim Sharif denied.

Ebrahim Sharif's trial opened before the High Criminal Court on 24 August 2015, when he was allowed to read a five-minute statement in which he reaffirmed his commitment to non-violence and highlighted that the role of the opposition was to criticize and pinpoint the wrongdoings for the government to fix and reform. He also said that the situation in Bahrain could only be solved through peaceful political means. On 24 February 2016 the court sentenced him to one year in prison, convicting him of "incitement to hatred and contempt of the regime" but acquitting him of "incitement to overthrow the regime by force and illegal means". The Public Prosecution appealed against the one-year sentence for the first charge and the acquittal of the second and Ebrahim Sharif's lawyers are cross-appealing.

After his 2015 arrest, Ebrahim Sharif's lawyers were able to visit him where he was detained, in al-Hala police station, north of Manama, but were unable to discuss his case in private, as two police officers were always in the room with them, the door was kept open and there was a camera and microphone in the room. Ebrahim Sharif was only allowed to receive a copy of his casefile from his lawyers after officers from the police station and the CID had examined it. The right to confidential communication with a lawyer is an important element of the right to a fair trial.

Ebrahim Sharif was jailed for five years in 2011 after an unfair trial for leading widespread peaceful anti-government protests, alongside 12 other leading opposition activists, who were jailed for between five years and life. He was released on 19 June 2015 under a royal pardon and Salah al-Khawaja (another of the opposition activists and brother of Abdulhadi al-Khawaja) was released from prison on 19 March 2016, after completing his five-year prison sentence. The other 11 opposition activists are still serving their sentences in Jaw prison.

Name: Ebrahim Sharif
Gender m/f: m

Further information on UA: 168/15 Index: MDE 11/4547/2016 Issue Date: 27 July 2016