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**AMNESTY  
INTERNATIONAL**



**EUROPEAN INSTITUTIONS OFFICE**

Brussels, 22 April 2015

Our Ref: B1676

Dear High Representative Mogherini,

### **INTERNATIONAL ATTENTION CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS IN BAHRAIN**

Last week, we published our report [\*Behind the Rhetoric: Human rights abuses in Bahrain continue unabated\*](#). The report highlights how, despite assurances towards the international community, the Bahraini government has intensified its crackdown on dissenting voices in recent months. We point out that although four years ago, following international pressure, the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry (BICI) was established, accountability remains a very distant goal. Since 2011, the cycle of repression has continued relentlessly and has seen hundreds of people tortured in prison – with some dying in custody as a result – and others killed in protests. Amnesty International believes that international attention can have a very positive impact on the Bahraini authorities' compliance with human rights and asks you to raise with them the following issues:

#### **Freedom of Expression**

Scores of prisoners of conscience (POCs) are still serving prison sentences for publicly expressing political opinions around the Bahraini uprising in 2011. Others have been charged more recently and received prison terms for criticism of the ruler, the institutions or foreign countries. The government also continues to clamp down on dissent by putting key political figures on trial. In February 2014, shortly before the third anniversary of the uprising, the government increased the penalty for publicly insulting the King, the Bahraini flag, or the national emblem to one to seven years in prison and a heavy fine.

#### **Accountability**

Abuses by the authorities, including during the 2011 uprising, continue to be inadequately addressed. The results of the investigations that were carried out into these abuses, and the sentences incurred by a handful of police officers, cannot be considered satisfactory. The institutions established to ensure accountability are struggling to gain the trust of the Shi'a majority population and are widely seen as a means to legitimise the Bahraini authorities before the international community. In practice, despite a few prosecutions of low-ranking officers, the security forces operate with a large degree of impunity amid continuing reports of torture of detainees and the use of excessive force against protesters.

#### **Freedom of Assembly**

The Bahraini *Law on Public Gatherings, Processions and Assemblies* (Law 18 of 1973) puts onerous procedures on those applying for permission to hold peaceful rallies, meetings, marches and other gatherings; it also allows the government to ban protests for reasons beyond what is permissible under international law. In general terms, it treats a fundamental right – which the government has an obligation to uphold and facilitate – as a privilege, placing arbitrary obstacles before those wishing to exercise their right to peaceful assembly. Many have duly been arrested and imprisoned for “illegal gatherings”. Meanwhile, protests in Manama have been banned indefinitely. Others outside the capital have been subjected to a heavy police presence leading, in many cases, to the use of tear gas and shotgun fire against protesters.

### **Revocation of Nationality**

Since 2012, a number of individuals have had their nationality revoked by the Bahraini authorities. Some of them live abroad but many others are currently in Bahrain and hold no other nationality. To render someone stateless is prohibited by customary international law, with very few specific exceptions. Bahrain is therefore in violation of its international obligations.

The recent lack of international attention has given the Bahraini authorities the green light to intensify their crackdown on dissent. In line with your commitments to place human rights at the centre of all external action, Amnesty International calls on the EU and its member states to:

- Remind the government of Bahrain of its obligation to protect the right to freedom of expression: including by releasing all POCs, ensuring an end to their harassment, arrest and imprisonment of individuals for the exercise of their legitimate freedom of speech, and amending legislation that contravenes international standards, especially articles 214, 215 and 216 of the Penal Code.
- Ask the Bahraini authorities to ensure that thorough and impartial investigations into all allegations of torture are taken up promptly, that results are made public, and that those found responsible are brought to justice.
- Impress upon the authorities the importance of freedom of assembly and that no one can be detained for exercising their legitimate right to assemble peacefully. The government also needs to put an end to the use of excessive force against protesters by the security forces.
- Urge the Bahraini government to rescind its decision to revoke the nationalities of some of its citizens. Push for a more comprehensive and prompt reform of the justice system in order to put an end to impunity.
- Raise concerns publicly and in private about human rights abuses in Bahrain with a view to ensuring the country's full compliance with its international human rights obligations.

We look forward to your reply and stand ready to provide any further information you may require.

Yours sincerely,



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