

# **Crackdown on the trade union movement in Bahrain**

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**The Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, a joint programme of the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) and the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT), requests your urgent intervention in the following situation in Bahrain.**

## **Crackdown on the trade union movement in Bahrain -BHR-002**

### **Description of the situation:**

The Observatory has been informed by reliable sources about the harassment against trade-union leaders and trade-unionists who called for strikes to protest violent repression led by security forces against peaceful protesters demanding human rights and democracy in the country, or who provided help to the victims of this repression.

In the wake of the wave of peaceful demonstrations which started in February 2011 and which have been met by the Bahraini authorities with excessive use of force, the General Federation of Bahrain Trade Unions (GFBTU) - to which more than 60 trade-unions are affiliated - first announced a nationwide strike to denounce the killing on February 14 and 15, 2011 by the military and security forces of peaceful protestors calling for reforms. This strike was called off on February 20, after the military first withdrew from the Pearl Roundabout on February 19. On March 13, 2011, the GFBTU called for the launch of an indefinite strike, in solidarity with protesters who had been violently evicted from the area adjacent to the Bahrain Financial Harbor on the same day. The strike was called off on March 22, 2011, when the Government assured the GFBTU that workers would not be harassed on the way to work.

Following these events, on April 5, 2011, the Parliament called on the Government to take immediate legal measures against the heads of organisations that supported the strikes, and to refer them to the Public Prosecution Office.

To date, the GFBTU registered 603 workers who have been dismissed by private employers for participating in the strikes.

The Observatory was further informed that on March 29 and 30, 2011, five members of the Board of Directors of the Bahrain Teachers' Society (BTS), Ms. Jaleela Al-Salman, Mr. Anwar Abdul-Aziz Akbar, Ms. Salah Al-Bari, Ms. Afrah Al-Asfour, Ms. Sana Abdul-Razak, were arrested without warrant by security forces and individuals in civilian clothes at their places of residence. All still remain reportedly detained incommunicado to date. Furthermore, on April 6, the Social Development Ministry issued a statement dissolving the BTS. The same day, security forces stormed the house of Mr. Mahdi Abu-Deeb, President of the BTS, and then arrested him in another house and took him to an unknown location. He also reportedly remains detained incommunicado to date. The Observatory fears that the six were arrested for their support to the call for the strikes mentioned-above.

On April 4, 2011, Mrs. Rulla El Saffar, President of the Bahrain Nursing Society (BNS), was summoned by phone to the Adlia Criminal Investigation Building and taken away from there by security forces to an unknown location. She had been active in providing help to injured victims of the demonstrations.

In addition, on April 6, 2011, the Social Development Minister issued an edict suspending the Board of Directors of the Bahrain Medical Society (BMS), and the Ministry of Health suspended 30 doctors and nurses whose cases were referred to an "investigation committee" created by the Ministry, which mandate is to investigate the medical personnel who treated injured victims of demonstrations.

The Observatory was also informed that on April 11, 2011, Dr. Nabeel Tamman, an Ear/Nose/Throat (ENT) specialist, member of Bahrain Human Rights Society (BHRS) and the former president of the Medical Committee, was arrested and taken by security forces to an unknown location. Dr. Tamman is under treatment for cancer, and needs constant medical care and medication.

Furthermore, Mr. Abdul Ghaffar Abdullah Hussein, one of the founding leaders of the Bahraini labour movement and Chairman of the trade-union of Bahrain Petroleum Company was fired on March 31, 2011 for having "called on workers to take part in the general strike». The management of the Bahrain Petroleum Company threatened to undertake a legal action against him and other members of the union.

The Observatory condemns the crackdown against trade-union leaders and trade-unionists, which merely seems to aim at sanctioning the exercise of their human rights activities. The Observatory is concerned about the arrests and intimidations against supporters of peaceful demonstrations and professionals providing injured demonstrators with medical assistance.

The Observatory urges the Bahraini authorities to take the necessary measures to guarantee the protection of all human rights defenders in Bahrain and, more generally, to comply with the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Defenders adopted on December 9, 1998 by the United Nations General Assembly, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as well as international and regional human rights instruments ratified by Bahrain, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

### **Actions requested:**

The Observatory urges the authorities of Bahrain to:

- i. Guarantee the physical and psychological integrity of the above-mentioned trade-union leaders and trade-unionists and all human rights defenders in Bahrain;
- ii. Put an end to any acts of harassment, including at the judicial and administrative level, against trade-unions, human rights organisations and their members, and against all human rights defenders in Bahrain;
- iii. Guarantee in all circumstances the independence of human rights organisations and prevent any interference in their activities, such as suspension of their board or dissolution;
- iv. Conform in any circumstances with the provisions of the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, adopted on December 9, 1998 by the United Nations General Assembly, in particular : its Article 1, which states that "everyone has the right, individually or in association with others, to promote the protection and realization of human rights and fundamental freedoms at the national and international levels";

its Article 5 (a) and (b) which provides “for the purpose of promoting and protecting human rights and fundamental freedoms, everyone has the right, individually and in association with others, at the national and international levels: (a) To meet or assemble peacefully; (b) To form, join and participate in non-governmental organizations, associations or groups;

its Article 6 (c) which states that: everyone has the right, individually and in association with others to study, discuss, form and hold opinions on the observance, both in law and in practice, of all human rights and fundamental freedoms and, through these and other appropriate means, to draw public attention to those matters;

its Article 10 which provides that “No one shall participate, by act or by failure to act where required, in violating human rights and fundamental freedoms and no one shall be subjected to punishment or adverse action of any kind for refusing to do so”;

and its Article 12.2 which states that “the State shall take all necessary measures to ensure the protection by the competent authorities of everyone, individually and in association with others, against any violence, threats, retaliation, de facto or de jure adverse discrimination, pressure or any other arbitrary action as a consequence of his or her legitimate exercise of the rights referred to in the present Declaration”.

v. Ensure in all circumstances respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms in accordance with international human rights standards and international instruments ratified by Bahrain.

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Please also write to diplomatic representations of Bahrain in your respective countries.

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\* From FIDH

<http://www.fidh.org/Crackdown-on-the-trade-union-movement-BHR-002>