

THE NORWEGIAN ACADEMY OF SCIENCE AND LETTERS

COMMITTEE ON HUMAN RIGHTS

Oslo, October 9, 2012

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His Majesty the King
Shaikh Hamad bin 'Issa Al Khalifa
Office of His Majesty the King
P.O. Box 555
Rifa'a Palace, Manama
Bahrain

Your Majesty,

On October 5th last year and May 29th, this year we took the liberty to send you two letters expressing our deep concern for the twenty Bahraini medical doctors, nurses and other health workers who had been arrested in March and April 2011 following the suppression of anti-government demonstrations by the state's security forces. The excessive force used by the security forces clearing the area around the al-Salmaniya medical complex in Manama resulted in numerous injuries that were treated by the medical staff of the hospital, and the twenty health workers appear to have been arrested solely for having carried out their duty to provide treatment for the injured regardless of political consideration. After a trial before a military court they were sentenced to prison terms ranging from five to fifteen years on September 29th, 2011. It is our understanding that two of the twenty defendants have later left the country.

We have since been extremely gratified to learn that a retrial of the remaining eighteen health workers before the High Criminal Court of Appeal in Manama has led to full exoneration of nine of the defendants; five defendants had their sentences reduced to the time already spent in prison; while four defendants had their sentences substantially reduced, from 15 to 5, 3 and 1 year and from 10 to 1 year respectively. We also understand that these persons remain free on bail pending an appeal.

Writing on behalf of the Norwegian Academy of Science and Letters we wish to express our deep gratitude to you and your government for your actions leading to the permanent release of fourteen out of the twenty health workers, and express our hope that the retrial of the four persons presently on bail will lead to their exoneration.

We would, however, like to draw your attention to the case of the Bahraini nurse Hassan Salman Matooq who is presently serving a three-year sentence at Jaw Prison in Manama. Mr. Matooq is a nurse at the Salmaniya Medical Complex. He was arrested at the hospital during the night shift of March 24th, 2011, and kept incommunicado for several weeks. While in detention he was tortured, deprived of sleep and forced to sign false confessions. On May 12th, 2011 a military court, the National Safety Court, sentenced Mr. Matooq to three years' imprisonment for having participated in a peaceful demonstration and disseminating photos that were claimed to have been fabricated. According to the best information available to us, proceedings before the National Safety Court have been characterized by failures to meet the accepted international standards for fair judicial proceedings. The verdict has nevertheless been upheld by a military court in June, and by the civilian Court of Cassation in November 2011.

On the other hand, the report of the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry which was published in November 2011, recommended that all cases against people not convicted for using or advocating the use of violence should be reviewed, and one month later the public prosecutor ordered that all charges related to freedom of expression should be dropped.

According to the best information available to us, Mr. Matooq has never used or advocated the use of violence as a political tool, and it appears that he has been incarcerated solely for exercising his right to freedom of expression and assembly.

We note with regret that the order from the public prosecutor has not been followed up in Mr. Matooq's case, and respectfully appeal to Your Majesty for his immediate release.

Yours sincerely,

Arne Haaland
Chair