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Bahrain's acceptance of key UPR recommendations welcome, but implementation must follow

Human Rights Council adopts Universal Periodic Review outcome on Bahrain

In its views on the report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) during the 21st session of the UN Human Rights Council, Bahrain expressed its acceptance of 156 recommendations - 143 of them fully and 13 of them partially - out of the 176 made during the UPR in May 2012.¹ Amnesty International today welcomes the Bahraini government's acceptance of these key UPR recommendations. However, the organization is concerned that continuing human rights abuses in the country and the limited nature of steps towards accountability risk making the exercise appear a hollow one.

Amnesty International welcomes the acceptance by the government of the 16 recommendations related to fair trial guarantees, including the release of those behind bars for exercising their right to freedom of expression.² However, Amnesty International remains concerned that, despite repeated assurances by the Bahraini government that the rights to freedom of expression and association are respected, not only do prisoners of conscience remain behind bars but in the past few weeks there has been a further clampdown on these freedoms. In September, the High Criminal Court of Appeal upheld harsh sentences imposed on 13 prisoners of conscience, among them Abdulhadi al-Khawaja and Ebrahim Sharif; and in August, human rights activist Zainab al-Khawaja was arrested and now faces trial for, among other things, tearing up a picture of the King. In August human rights defender Nabeel Rajab received a three-year prison sentence for merely exercising his right to freedom of expression and association.

Amnesty International welcomes the government's support of the 11 recommendations to investigate allegations of torture and other ill-treatment of those detained after protests in 2011 and to prosecute those found responsible.³ However, Amnesty International is concerned that the authorities have not taken significant enough steps towards justice and accountability, despite the sentencing of three security officers for abuses and recently announced charges brought against several others for alleged mistreatment of prisoners. So far the outcome of investigations into allegations of torture and killings has not been made public and the number of officers suspected of abuses who are on trial remains very low.

While Amnesty International welcomes the government's acceptance of 22 recommendations to amend national legislation,⁴ the organization regrets the government's rejection of nine

¹ A/HRC/21/6/Add.1, paragraph 4.

² A/HRC/21/6, paragraphs 115.91, 115.98, 115.100, 115.101, 115.114-115.118, 115.122, 115.23, 115.125, 115.126, 115.30, 115.146, 115.159 (Slovakia, United States of America, Czech Republic, Germany, Austria, Belgium, Germany, Poland, Ireland, Norway, Mauritania, Australia, United Kingdom, Netherlands, France, Switzerland).

³ A/HRC/21/6, paragraphs 115.84-115.88, 115.92, 115.106, 115.108, 115.111, 115.112, 115.121 (Czech Republic, Italy, Austria, Maldives, Slovakia, Germany, Switzerland, Norway, Finland).

⁴ A/HRC/21/6, paragraphs 115.21-115.27, 115.30, 115.32, 115.33, 115.88, 115.90, 115.92, 115.99, 115.146, 115.148, 115.149, 115.151, 115.153, 115.154, 115.157, 115.160 (Belgium, Spain, United Kingdom, Slovakia, Mexico, Ireland, Egypt, Mauritania, Morocco, Maldives, Korea, Canada, France, Norway, Chile, Austria, Estonia, Netherlands, Costa Rica).

recommendations to align national legislation to the Rome Statute.⁵ Furthermore, Amnesty International is concerned that Bahraini law still contains vaguely worded provisions that can be used to criminalize the peaceful exercise of the rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly, in breach of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Bahrain is a party. Political associations have been widely restricted and only able to organize political rallies on very limited occasions. Scores of people have been arrested in recent months for participating in demonstrations.

Amnesty International also regrets the government's rejection of recommendations pertaining to the abolition of the death penalty.

The UPR of Bahrain will have been a hollow exercise if the government does not act to give effect to recommendations at the national level. The international community also has an important role – it must take a stand on Bahrain's continued human rights abuses and lack of accountability.

Background

The UN Human Rights Council adopted the outcome of the Universal Periodic Review of Bahrain on 19 September 2012 during its 21st session. Prior to the adoption of the review outcome Amnesty International delivered the oral statement above. Amnesty International had earlier submitted information on the situation of human rights in Bahrain:

<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE11/066/2011/en>

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⁵ A/HRC/21/6, paragraphs 115.1, 115.2, 115.4, 115.11, 115.12, 115.13, 115.15, 115.17, 115.79 (Czech Republic, Brazil, Estonia, Slovakia, Latvia, Costa Rica, Switzerland, Hungary, Austria).