



UA 185/17

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BAHRAIN:

ACTIVIST RISKS 7 YEARS IN JAIL FOR RETWEETS

Bahraini activist Yaser Mawali has been on trial before the Lower Court in Manama, the capital, since 7 June charged with “insulting the King” for two posts he had retweeted. He has been detained since 29 May and his next hearing is scheduled for 16 August. If convicted, he faces up to seven years in prison. He is a prisoner of conscience.



Image via: @Yaser_Mawali, Twitter.

Activist Yaser Mawali’s trial before the lower Court in Manama, Bahrain’s capital, began on 7 June on charge of “insulting the King” through retweeting two posts. Two further hearings took place on 19 June and on 26 July. His next trial session is scheduled for 16 August. If convicted, he could face up to seven years in prison under Article 214 of Bahrain’s Penal Code.

Yaser Mawali was arrested on 29 May at 3:30pm after officers dressed in civilian clothing came to his house in a village in Muharraq, an island north east of Manama. According to Amnesty International’s information, the officers asked his family if he was home and told his relatives that they were from the courier company Aramex. They added that they had an envelope for him that had to be delivered by hand to him. Yaser Mawali’s family told them that he was not home and would be back in an hour. The officers came back an hour later after Yaser Mawali had returned home. There, he received a phone call telling him to come out of the house.

When he went outside, he was arrested without a warrant and put in the back of the car. The officers came back to his house 10 minutes later, took his mobile phone and told his family that he was being taken to the Criminal Investigations Directorate (CID). Yaser Mawali called his family at 1:30am and said his interrogation was finished and he will be taken to Dry Dock prison in north eastern Bahrain and to the Public Prosecution in the morning. On the morning of 30 May, his lawyer and family went to the Public Prosecutor’s office but only his lawyer was allowed in. The Public Prosecution ordered his detention for seven days and charged him with “insulting the King”. On 2 June, Yaser Mawali called his family and said that he was at Dry Dock prison where he has been detained since his arrest.

Amnesty International has reviewed the two retweeted posts and considers them to be peaceful. His detention comes amid a heightened crackdown against peaceful critics of the Bahraini government since mid-2016.

Please send a letter, tweet, email or fax without delay. (Postage: \$2.50).

* Call on the Bahraini authorities to release Yaser Mawali immediately and unconditionally as he is a prisoner of conscience, detained solely for peacefully exercising his right to freedom of expression.

* Urge 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, including Article 214 of the Penal Code.

Here is the contact information you will need:

King

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Salutation: Your Majesty

Minister of Interior

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Please send a copy to:

Minister of Justice and Islamic Affairs

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His Excellency Shaikh Abdullah bin Mohammed bin Rashid Al Khalifa
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Via website: www.bahrainembassy.org Click on CONTACT and scroll to the bottom. You can send emails via the site directly to specific positions within the Embassy. Choose Legal & Human Rights Directorate and enter your message.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

In February 2014, the authorities toughened penalties for "insulting the King". The offence is now punishable by up to seven years in prison and a fine of up to 10,000BD (about US\$26,500). The sentence could be higher if the offence happens in the presence of the King. Under Article 214 of Bahrain's Penal Code: "A prison sentence shall be the penalty for any person who offends the emir of the country [the King], the national flag or emblem". This violates the right to freedom of expression.

This is not the first time Bahrain has detained or convicted someone in relation to “insulting the King”. In October 2014, human rights defender Zainab al-Khawaja was sentenced to three years in prison and a fine of 3,000BD (approximately US\$8,000). In October 2015, the sentence was reduced to one year. See Amnesty International's Urgent Action: Zainab Al-Khawaja risks prison after appeal, 23 October 2015:

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde11/2728/2015/en/>

In another case, human rights defender Ahmad Hassan Ali Mshaima' was sentenced to one year in prison on the same charge in December 2014. See Amnesty International's Urgent Action: A year in prison for "insulting the king", 11 December 2014:

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde11/050/2014/en/>

Since June 2016, the Bahraini authorities have intensified their crackdown on perceived critics of the government. Dozens of human rights defenders and political activists were prevented and banned by the Bahraini authorities from travelling to Geneva, Switzerland, to take part in the United Nations Human Rights Council sessions. More recently, at the end of April 2017, ahead of Bahrain's UN human rights review session in Geneva on 1 May, at least 32 perceived government critics were summoned for questioning by the Public Prosecution and the majority of them were charged with “illegal gathering in Duraz”.