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BAHRAIN: DROP CHARGES AGAINST WOMEN HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDER

Bahraini woman human rights defender Ebtisam al-Saegh was released from Isa Town Detention for women, in the Bahraini capital Manama on 22 October. She has yet to receive the conditions of her release or information about her trial. As such, she remains at risk of detention.



Image Credit: via [Bahrain Center for Human Rights](#)

On the evening of 22 October, human rights defender Ebtisam al-Saegh was released from Isa Town Detention for women, in the Bahraini capital Manama. On the afternoon of the same day, she found out about her release order. An hour later, state security officers conducted a thorough search of Ebtisam al-Saegh's cell and confiscated all her documents, including her medical files and notes on the situation in the prison. The state security officers eventually agreed to only retain a copy of Ebtisam al-Saegh's medical files after she successfully argued she needed them in order to follow up on her health. Meanwhile a highly ranked female prison officer threatened to block Ebtisam al-Saegh's release and told her that she would be returning to the prison as a convict and to prepare for what was to come regardless of Tweets, protests and the pressure of human rights organizations. Ebtisam al-Saegh and her lawyer have yet to receive the casefile from the court and have not been informed about the conditions of her release. No new date for her trial has been announced yet. Ebtisam al-Saegh remains at risk of being re-arrested.

On 18 July Ebtisam al-Saegh was charged by the Terrorism Crimes Prosecution with "using human rights work as a cover to communicate and cooperate with Alkarama Foundation to provide them with information and fake news about the situation in Bahrain to undermine its status abroad". Ebtisam al-Saegh's detention was extended for a further six months pending investigation on the same day.

Following her release Ebtisam al-Saegh thanked Amnesty International and all supporters for their efforts on her behalf. She said: "I was aware of your support and this brought me joy and a feeling of safety which is so important for all prisoners".

Please send an urgent letter, email or fax without delay!

* Call on the authorities to drop all the charges against Ebtisam al Saegh since they are related solely to the peaceful exercise of her right to freedom of expression and her human rights work.

* Urge them to uphold the right to freedom of expression and repeal laws that criminalize the peaceful exercise of the rights to freedom of expression, association, and peaceful assembly, including Article 216 of the Penal Code.

Here is the contact information you will need:

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Please send a copy to:

Minister of Justice and Islamic Affairs

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Ebtisam al-Saegh, 48, is a Bahraini human rights defender who works with the Bahraini NGO Salam for Democracy and Human Rights (SALAM DHR). She was arrested on 3 July at 11:45pm after around 25 masked officers in plain clothes, who claimed to belong to the Criminal Investigation Directorate (CID), raided her house in Jid Ali, south of Manama. The officers confiscated her mobile phone and her national ID card and arrested her without presenting an arrest warrant. She was allowed to take her medication with her. She immediately began a hunger strike in protest of her arrest, her lack of contact with her family and the fact that her lawyer was not allowed to attend her interrogations despite multiple requests. Earlier that day, Ebtisam al-Saegh had tweeted about the National Security Agency's

ill-treatment of women and the abuse of female detainees at Isa Town detention centre for women, and held the King of Bahrain responsible for their actions.

Ebtisam al-Saegh's interrogations took place at an undisclosed location outside the detention facilities. On 10 July in the evening, during interrogation, her health deteriorated. She suffered from irregular heartbeat (arrhythmia), numbness in the left hand, a drop in her blood sugar levels and blood pressure, and bloating of the stomach due to her irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) condition. She was taken for treatment to the Ministry of Interior hospital in al-Qalaa. Medical staff performed an electrocardiogram (ECG) and gave her intravenous fluids, including glucose, to raise her blood sugar levels, before discharging her. She was then again taken away for the continuation of her interrogation. Amnesty International understands that Ebtisam al-Saegh was interrogated by the authorities, believed to be from the NSA, for between 12 to 13 hours daily for about a month at an unknown location. After every interrogation session, she was held in solitary confinement at Isa Town detention centre for women. On 1 August, Ebtisam al-Saegh ended her hunger strike after receiving a family visit.

A few weeks prior to her arrest, on 26 May, NSA authorities had interrogated Ebtisam al-Saegh at their building in al-Muharraq. She told Amnesty International that upon arrival she was immediately blindfolded, and in the subsequent hours, sexually assaulted, beaten all over her body, kicked in the stomach and forced to stand for almost seven hours while being interrogated. During her interrogation, she was questioned about Duraz, a village where security forces attacked an ongoing protest on 23 May which resulted in the killing of five people, about other human rights defenders she knew, as well as about her participation at the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva in March, where she spoke out about human rights violations in Bahrain. They also demanded she stop all her human rights activities or else she would be further targeted. The NSA released Ebtisam al-Saegh from their building at around 11pm in a state of shock. She was transferred to the hospital where she received treatment for a nervous breakdown. For further information, see Amnesty International's Public Statement: Woman Human Rights Defender tortured and sexually assaulted as Bahrain renews campaign to silence peaceful critics, (Index: MDE 11/6392/2017).

Alkarama Foundation is a non-governmental organisation based in Switzerland, defending individuals subjected to human rights violations in the Arab world. In November 2014, the United Arab Emirates published a list of organizations and groups it designated as terrorist, among them the Alkarama Foundation. Ebtisam al-Saegh has no connection to the Foundation.