

20 February 2001

AI Index MDE 11/003/2001 - News Service Nr. 31

## **Bahrain: Amnesty International hails recent positive human rights developments**

Amnesty International has described as "highly significant for Bahrainis" recent decisions by the Amir to abolish the State Security Law and the State Security Court.

On 18 February the Amir of Bahrain, Shaikh Hamad bin Issa Al Khalifa issued Decree 11 of 2001 abolishing the "Decree Law on State Security Measures", which has been in force since October 1974. It empowered the Minister of the Interior to detain individuals without charge or trial for up to three years. In another decree (No. 4 of 2001) signed the same day, the Amir abolished the authority of the Supreme Civil Court of Appeal (in its capacity as a State Security Court) to consider offences relating to internal and external state security. The Bahraini Government has also promised to grant nationality to around 10,000 bidoun or stateless inhabitants, mostly Shia'a Muslims.

The recent decisions are the latest in a series of important pro-human rights measures implemented by the government over the last two weeks. On 5 February, the Amir ordered the release of 316 political prisoners and detainees held in connection with the civil unrest of the 1990s. Those who used to work for the Government before their imprisonment are to be reinstated in their jobs and will be paid their salaries from the date of the Amiri amnesty, and former students will also be allowed back in to the university.

In addition, 108 Bahraini nationals living in forced exile have been told they could go back to Bahrain. Other Bahrainis living in forced exile and who were not included in the amnesty were also invited back to Bahrain. Scores of Bahrainis living in exile are preparing to go back.

Amnesty International warmly welcomes these positive developments in the field of human rights in Bahrain. The organization is now calling on the Bahraini Government to consider ratifying vital international human rights treaties such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women. The Government should also review and amend legislation including the penal code, and the 1989 law relating to non-governmental associations, to ensure their compatibility with international human rights standards.

### **Background**

In a referendum held on 14 and 15 February, Bahrainis voted overwhelmingly for the national charter. The charter provides for a constitutional monarchy and a government based on the separation of powers between the three branches: legislative, executive and judicial. Male and female citizens will have the right to participate in public life and to vote. The charter also provides for a bicameral legislative system with an elected parliament, which will have full legislative powers, and an appointed Majlis al-Shura (consultative council).

\ENDS

public document

\*\*\*\*\*

For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566

Amnesty International, 1 Easton St., London WC1X 0DW web : <http://www.amnesty.org>