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BAHRAIN: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL RENEWS ITS CALL FOR HALT TO UNFAIR TRIALS AND SEEKS REVIEW OF LEGISLATION

The Bahraini Government should immediately stop unfair State Security Court trials and retry those convicted in accordance with international standards, Amnesty International said following the sentencing of 15 defendants today.

The organization is also calling for a government review of legislation governing the proceedings of the court in the light of these standards.

The State Security Court passed its first sentences in the trials of a group of 81 defendants which began on 1 March (59 of them in their presence and the rest *in absentia*) on charges of involvement in an alleged Iranian-backed coup to overthrow the Bahraini Government and of membership of a prohibited organization, *Hizbullah*-Bahrain.

Two of the main defendants in the case who risked facing the death penalty, 'Ali Ahmad Kadhem al-Mutaghawwi and Jassem Hassan Mansur al-Khayyat, were sentenced to 15 and 12 years' imprisonment respectively. Thirteen other defendants received custodial sentences of between three and eight years, while 11 were acquitted. Other verdicts are expected within days.

"We welcome the fact that to date none of the defendants have been sentenced to death, but we believe these trials to be have been manifestly unfair," Amnesty International said.

None of the accused will to be able to appeal to a higher court, a fundamental principle of justice and an essential part of the right to a fair trial recognized in international standards.

"In view of the seriousness of the charges against the defendants, and the unfairness of many past trials we have documented, the public assurances made last week by Ministry of Justice officials about the fairness of these trials are inadequate," Amnesty International said.

"The credibility of these assurances is further called into question by the government's continued refusal to allow independent observers, including from our organization, to attend State Security Court trials".

In its letter Amnesty International said it takes no position on the nature of the charges against the defendants, and recognizes the right of every government to protect its citizens and to bring to justice any person accused of acts of violence and other serious offences.

"The public interest, however, is never served by denying the accused the right to a fair and public trial in accordance with international standards," the organization said.

In an earlier statement issued on 17 March, Amnesty International said that some of the 59 defendants were reportedly tortured while held incommunicado to extract "confessions" from them which may be used to convict them. Their lawyers were given inadequate opportunity to prepare their defence and were denied access to their clients until the trials began. ENDS\