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Bahrain: Halt the targeting of critic living abroad through the harassment of his family in Bahrain

Amnesty International has today called on the Bahraini authorities to put an end to the continuous harassment and targeting of the family of human rights activist Sayed Ahmed Alwadaei, who resides in the United Kingdom (UK), which Amnesty International believes is an attempt to force him to halt his peaceful activities and muzzle him from afar.

Sayed Ahmed Alwadaei is the Director of Advocacy at the Bahrain Institute for Rights and Democracy (BIRD). His brother-in-law, **Sayed Nizar Alwadaei**, 18, his mother-in-law, **Hajer Mansoor Hassan**, 48, and a cousin, **Mahmood Marzooq Mansoor**, 29, are on trial in Bahrain accused of planting “fake bombs” which the police found in Sheikh Zayed Street and near the al-Mayoof roundabout, in al-Aali area, southwest of the capital, Manama, on 20 and 28 January 2017 respectively. All three were forced to “confess”.

Amnesty International calls for the charges against Sayed Nizar Alwadaei, Hajer Mansoor Hassan and Mahmood Marzooq Mansoor to be dropped as they are based solely on “confessions” extracted as a result of torture and other ill-treatment. Amnesty International believes that these trials are part of the ongoing campaign waged by the Bahraini authorities to silence dissenting and critical voices, including those abroad.

The trial of Sayed Nizar Alwadaei, his mother Hajer Mansoor Hassan and his maternal cousin, Mahmood Marzooq Mansoor in relation to the 28 January “fake bomb” began on 7 May. They are charged with “planting and carrying with unknown others an object similar to an improvised explosive in a public place, for the purpose of terrorism”. They appeared in court on 6 June for their third trial session. Three members of their families were denied entry to the court room. During the hearing, the testimony of one of the Criminal Investigation Directorate (CID) investigators was heard. He was cross-examined by the defence lawyers and asked the reason why Hajer Mansoor Hassan had been summoned for investigation. He said it was based on Sayed Nizar Alwadaei’s “confession”, in contradiction to the police report he had filled relating to the interrogation of Hajer Mansoor Hassan and in which he stated that he had investigated her prior to the summons. The court rejected the defence lawyers’ request to release them on bail and adjourned the trial to 18 September.

Sayed Nizar Alwadaei has also been facing a separate trial since 25 April, on the same charge, in relation to the 20 January “fake bomb” case. His third trial session took place on 8 June but the judge adjourned to 5 October as the prosecution witness did not attend court.

Sayed Nizar Alwadaei and Mahmood Marzooq Mansoor were arrested on 2 March by a group of masked security personnel at 3:40am following a raid on Mahmood Marzooq Mansoor’s home in the village of Jidd Ali, south of the capital Manama, in connection with the two “fake bombs”. Two hours later, Sayed Nizar Alwadaei was allowed to place a call to his family, informing them that he was being held at the CID.

Following this, on 5 March Hajer Mansoor Hassan was summoned for interrogation to the CID and was arrested. While waiting to be interrogated she received a call from Sayed Nizar Alwadaei, who told her that he had been tortured. Her interrogation without her lawyer present, lasted from 4.15pm to 2.30am, throughout which she was kept standing. This resulted in her collapsing and fainting and sustaining an injury to her hand and shoulder. She was transferred by ambulance to the hospital where she was given intravenous fluids.

During their interrogations, Hajer Mansoor Hassan, Sayed Nizar Alwadaei, and Mahmood Marzooq Mansoor were coerced into “confessing” their involvement in the “fake bombs” and they signed documents to this effect. They were also interrogated about Sayed Ahmed Alwadaei’s activities in the UK.

On 8 March the Public Prosecution charged Hajer Mansoor Hassan, Sayed Nizar Alwadaei and Mahmood Marzooq Mansoor with “planting and carrying with unknown others an object similar to an improvised explosive in a public place, for the purpose of terrorism”. Only Hajer Mansoor Hassan had her lawyer present. She and Mahmood Marzooq Mansoor both denied the charges brought against them and retracted their confessions. Mahmood Marzooq Mansoor stated that he had signed the confession without being able to read them and Hajer Mansoor Hassan explained that she had been pressured and threatened into confessing. She told the Prosecutor: “If you send me back to the CID I will say anything you want me to say and will sign the [any] document”. The Public Prosecution noted in her file that her “confession” had been taken under pressure and threats. Sayed Nizar Alwadaei told his mother’s lawyer after his questioning by the Prosecutor said that he had been deprived of sleep for two days, and forced to make statements accusing his mother of involvement in the planting of a “fake bomb”.

According to forensic reports dated 9 March and seen by Amnesty International, no fingerprints or DNA traces which could be linked to Sayed Nizar Alwadaei, Hajer Mansoor Hassan or Mahmood Marzooq Mansoor were found on the “fake bombs”. The organization also examined the reports of the medical examinations all three underwent on 9 March. Sayed Nizar Alwadaei showed marks on the top left of his back, on his right knee, on the centre of his right calf and his right ankle caused by abrasion and friction consistent with falls.

Background

Sayed Ahmed Alwadaei is the Director of Advocacy at the Bahrain Institute for Rights and Democracy (BIRD). He had participated in the 2011 demonstrations, and was arrested, tortured, tried by a Military Court and sentenced to six months in prison. He then fled to the UK where he has been living since then. The Bahraini authorities have since continued to harass him and his family.

On 26 October 2016, Sayed Ahmed Alwadaei took part in a protest in London against the visit of the King of Bahrain to the British Prime Minister.

The same day, his wife, Duaa Alwadaei, 26, and their two year-old son, Youssef, were prevented from boarding their evening flight back to the UK after a family visit to Bahrain. Both have right of residence in the UK. They were detained by security officers at Manama International Airport. Duaa Alwadaei was interrogated for seven hours during which she says she was beaten by a policewoman and threatened with imprisonment if she spoke out about her ordeal. She was told that they were going after her husband and asked about her family members and whether she knew about Sayed Ahmed Alwadaei’s plans to protest against the King’s visit. She was also told that she was on a travel ban, despite having been cleared by the Bahraini border authorities prior to boarding. Duaa Alwadaei was released and was able to travel back to the UK on 1 November. The Bahrain Embassy in the UK sent an email to journalists on 29 October stating that her interrogation was “based on the Mr. Alwadaei’s history of being involved in and supporting terrorist acts”, adding that in view of “the visit of His Majesty the King to the United Kingdom last week, precautionary security measures were necessary”. The Embassy then issued a statement on 1 November stating that she had “failed to

cooperate with airport security” and “assaulted a female police officer”.

Sayed Ahmed Alwadaei has not been convicted in Bahrain in relation to involvement in and supporting terrorist acts and the organization is particularly concerned that the authorities have linked Duaa Alwadaei’s arrest at the airport to the King’s visit to the UK.