



Education International
Internationale de l'Éducation
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UN Special Rapporteur on the rights to Freedom of
peaceful Assembly and of Association
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Brussels, 16 April 2012

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President

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Subject: Allegations of violations of Bahraini teacher trade unions' rights

Education International is the global union federation of teacher unions representing over 30 million teachers and education workers in 170 countries.

Dear Sir,

Education International is respectfully submitting information about the arrests, dismissals and repression against teachers, as well as violent arrest, detention, torture and denial of fair judicial treatment of the leaders and activists of the Bahrain Teacher Association (BTA also called Bahrain Teacher Society). The BTA was formed as a substitute for a teacher union because the Civil Service Bureau Act 1 of 2003 forbids the establishment of unions in the governmental sector. Therefore it restricts teachers and education workers, who form the biggest division in the governmental sector, from forming a real union. This is the first breach of ILO convention 87 on freedom of association.

In October 2011, EI joined the International Confederation of Trade Unions in lodging a complaint to the Committee of Freedom of Association against the Government of Bahrain (case number 2882). This submission highlights the main concern expressed by the representatives of BTA to EI. The CFA complaint contains all the relevant details (attached).

Following the February 2011 forceful crackdown on peaceful pro-democracy activists, several people were reported killed, some by live rounds, and hundreds sustained injuries. Human right defenders, trade unionists, teachers, students and journalists were amongst the victims of the security forces violence. On 13 March, the ministry of education announced the temporarily closure of all school. The university academic year was also suspended. EI collected the name of students from the Teachers College in Bahrain who have been detained and 18 academics and administrators of the University of Bahrain, including the Dean of the Business School, who have been dismissed. The BTA called for a teacher strike on 14 March to raise concern about the physical security of academics, education workers and students in all education institutions. When schools reopened for staff on 20 March, teachers refused to return to work and volunteers were recruited to fill in for striking teachers. All public school teachers who were affiliated to the BTA decided not to go to work in support of the pro-democracy movement but also because there were fears for the life of the teacher unionists. Also on 20 March 2011, the house of the President of the BTA, Mr. Mahdi Abu Deeb, was raided by twenty members of security forces in the middle on the night. In his absence, his wife and children were interrogated for two hours. Other officials of the BTA were summoned by the Ministry of Education for interrogation, creating a climate of fear of arbitrary arrest and detention amongst teacher unionists.

On 29 March, the Vice President, Jalila al-Salman, and other officials of the Bahraini Teacher Association were arrested, including the General Secretary. The BTA female vice president's house in Manama was raided by more than 40 security officers, some in helicopters. She was reportedly taken to the Criminal Investigations Directorate in Manama where she remained for about a week during which she was beaten and held in solitary confinement. The authorities also conducted pre-dawn raids on the homes of many students, teachers and teacher union leaders, detaining some for months with no trial and depriving their families of any knowledge of their whereabouts. According to BTA, more than 8,000 teachers have been affected by the crackdown, creating a climate of fear amongst educators.



The Ministry of Social Development also dissolved the Bahrain Teachers 'Association using a law written in 1989 for the purpose of controlling the activities of the institutions of civil society, known as the law of Societies, to continue intervening in its management, and restrict its freedom. The law was repeatedly criticized by local and global organizations, because it violates the basic human rights in freedom of expression and assembly.

On 11 April, the security forces located the BTA President, Mr. Mahdi Abu Deeb, and arrested him forcefully. He was immediately subjected to torture. EI filed a submission on the allegation of torture to the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture (attached).

In September 2011, the military National Safety Court sentenced Jalila al-Salman and Mahdi 'Issa Abu Dheeb, respectively Vice President and President of the Bahraini Teachers Association to three and ten years in prison, for having expressed their legitimate rights in accordance with the principles of freedom of association and freedom of expression.

On 11 September, the BTA President started a hunger strike to protest his detention and the incarceration of his colleagues as well as the fact that he was trialled by a military court although he is a civilian. On 12 October, Mahdi Abu Dheeb was transferred to the Jaw prison which is known for its appalling detention conditions. Mahdi Abu Dheeb never got treatment for diabetes and high blood pressure.

Jalila al-Salman and Mahdi 'Issa Abu Dheeb appealed the decision of the military National Safety Court which sentenced them for unwarranted accusations, including inciting others to commit crimes, calling for hatred and overthrow of the ruling system, leaving work on purpose and encouraging others to do so and taking part in illegal gathering. The initial appeal of 11 December 2011 was adjourned by the Supreme Court of Appeal to 19 February, 2 April and eventually 2 May 2012 consequently prolonging the detention.

In the last hearing sessions, the Court allowed both defendants, Mahdi Issa Abu Dheeb and Jalila Al Salman, to be examined by an independent medical panel. The court also accepted to consider as evidence the report of the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry as well as the complaint of alleged ill treatment. On 2 April, Abu Dheeb was allowed to speak during the Court hearing for the first time. He described to the Court in detail the severe ill treatment he was subjected to during his arrest and detention. Mahdi's health condition was so bad that he could not stand up to make his statement in front of the court.

On 2 May, the Supreme Court of appeal will again consider Mr Mahdi Abu Dheeb's request for release on bail. The three previous sessions, on 11 December and 19 February, and 2 April postponed the verdict, consequently prolonging the teacher union President detention under deplorable health conditions.

In view of the gravity of the facts, EI respectfully urges you to investigate the arbitrary procedures against the Bahraini Teachers Association leaders and members which are clear violations against the freedom of association, and violate Bahrain's own labor laws as well as Bahrain's obligations as a member state of the International Labour Organization.

EI remains at your disposal would you have questions regarding this communication and looks forward to receive your strong recommendations on this matter.

Yours sincerely,

Fred van Leeuwen
General Secretary