



Education International  
Internationale de l'Éducation  
Internacional de la Educación  
Bildungsinternationale

## TO EI MEMBER ORGANISATIONS

Brussels, 11 August 2011

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### President

Susan Hopgood

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## URGENT ACTION APPEAL – BAHRAIN

### Release detained teacher union leaders

Dear colleagues,

**Education International (EI) issued a first Urgent Action Appeal on 01 April 2011. This second appeal to EI member organisations is launched because the situation of human and trade union rights in the country remains critical.**

EI, together with Amnesty International, urgently calls on its member organisations to appeal for the release of **Jalila al-Salman** and **Mahdi 'Issa Mahdi Abu Dheeb**, Vice-President and President of the Bahraini Teachers Association (BTA) arrested along with several other board members of the BTA. While we understand their colleagues have been released, **Jalila al-Salman** and **Mahdi 'Issa Mahdi Abu Dheeb** remain incarcerated awaiting trial in a civilian court.

EI also condemns government's action to dissolve the BTA and replace its leaders with others more amenable to the regime.

Jalila al-Salman's house in Manama was raided on 29 March by more than 40 security officers. 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. She is believed to have been transferred to the custody of the military and held there for two months, before being transferred again to a detention centre in 'Issa Town, where she is currently held. Jalila al-Salman's family were not aware of her whereabouts until recently and have only been allowed to see her there on two occasions and under very strict surveillance.

Mahdi 'Issa Mahdi Abu Dheeb's house was raided by 20 members of security forces on 20 March in the middle of the night. His wife and children were interrogated for two hours. This raid marked the beginning of the persecution of teachers and students, creating a climate of fear of arbitrary arrest and detention. On 29 March, the security forces again inspected the house of the President, twice on the same day, without being able to find him. He was subsequently arrested and remains in detention.

The charges against the two union leaders include "inciting hatred towards the regime", "calling to overthrow and change the regime by force", "calling on parents not to send their children to school" and "calling on teachers to stop working and participate in strikes and demonstrations". The two leaders were brought to trial before the National Safety Court of First Instance (a military court) on 15 June. After two further hearings, their trial was transferred to a civilian court and postponed until further notice.

Amnesty International has reviewed the statements issued by the BTA and has listened to speeches delivered by its President Mahdi 'Issa Mahdi Abu Dheeb. Amnesty found no evidence that either of them advocated violence of any kind. Consequently, Amnesty believes that they are likely prisoners of conscience detained solely for exercising their legitimate rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly as leaders of the BTA.

- **EI calls for the immediate and unconditional release of Jalila al-Salman and Mahdi 'Issa Mahdi Abu Dheeb.**



- **EI calls on the Bahraini government to cease its persecution of teachers and students.**
- **EI urges the Bahraini government to reverse its decision to dissolve the BTA.**
- **EI urges the Bahraini government to respect the fundamental rights and freedoms of teachers, students and their unions, and to begin a reform process that not only allows but enables freedom of expression and freedom of association for its citizens.**

## **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Since March 2011 Bahrain has been carrying out a punitive and vindictive campaign of violent repression against its own citizens. The repression has been characterised by widespread arbitrary arrest, allegations of torture and ill treatment, unfair trials and mass dismissals of workers, especially teachers, and expulsions of students. Many teacher unionists participated in the pro-democracy movement against state repression of human and trade union rights that started on 14 February in Pearl Square, Manama. Many teachers also responded to the call for strike action made on 14 March to raise concern about the physical security of academics, education workers and students in education institutions. The government response has been violent repression and persecution.

Members of the BTA and the Bahrain Centre for Human Rights now report at least 66 of such serious infringements of their human and trade union rights since the uprisings for democracy began.

Teacher dismissals have escalated, reported this week by Karim Radhi of the General Federation of Bahrain Trade Union to be more than 132. A claim by the Ministry of Education that only 58 teachers were dismissed on various grounds during the unrest has been publicly refuted by teachers themselves, who also say they were not given a chance to defend themselves after receiving the recommendation of termination of service, and that written statements of witnesses were overlooked. The salaries of those under investigation were either stopped completely, or halved. Of concern also is that the investigation and dismissals continued even during the official holidays of teachers that coincides with the holy month of Ramadan.

The authorities arrested 19 students from the Teachers College in Bahrain in March, expelled many others, including 63 students on 12 June, effectively ending their careers before they have properly begun.

## **WHAT YOU CAN DO**

### **1. Send appeals, in English, Arabic or your own language, urging the Bahraini authorities to:**

- Release immediately and unconditionally Jalila al-Salman and Mahdi 'Issa Mahdi Abu Deeb; protect them from torture or other ill-treatment; immediately set up a full, impartial and independent investigation into the reported ill-treatment of Jalila al-Salman and bring those responsible to justice;
- Reinstatement of the teachers dismissed and the students expelled, together with their salaries and scholarships;
- Respect the fundamental rights and freedoms of teachers, students and union activists in accordance with international standards;
- Engage in respectful dialogue to bring about a peaceful transition to democracy and a fair resolution of the current impasse and legitimate claims of the Bahraini people.



**SEND APPEALS TO:**

- **His Majesty Shaikh Hamad bin 'Issa Al Khalifa, King of Bahrain**  
P.O. Box 555, Rifa'a Palace, al-Manama, Bahrain  
Fax: +973 17664587
- **Prince Khalifa bin Salman Al Khalifa, Prime Minister**  
Fax: +973 17533033; +973 175 32839
- **H.E. Majid bin Ali al-Naimi, Minister of Education**  
Fax: +973 17273656; E-mail: [moe@moe.gov.bh](mailto:moe@moe.gov.bh)

Copies to:

- Diplomatic representatives of Bahrain accredited to your country
- EI ([headoffice@ei-ie.org](mailto:headoffice@ei-ie.org) or fax +32 2 224 0606).

2. **Encourage your members to send online messages** to the authorities through the EI website: [www.ei-ie.org/uaas/issues\\_actions](http://www.ei-ie.org/uaas/issues_actions).
3. **Express your solidarity with the Bahraini Teachers Association**, through EI.
4. **Give visibility to the situation of teachers in Bahrain and the online appeal** in your magazine, on your website, during meetings and via other appropriate means.

EI will endeavour to keep you updated on all developments. For additional information or to discuss possible action, contact the [EI Human and Trade Union Rights Coordinator](#).

**EI thanks you for your solidarity in support of our Bahraini colleagues.**

Yours sincerely,

Fred van Leeuwen  
General Secretary