

Human Rights Watch

Torture, Former Combatants, Political Prisoners, Terror Suspects, & Terrorists

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(Manama) - The death of businessman and activist Kareem Fakhrawi on April 12, 2011, shows the urgent need for thorough and impartial investigations into allegations of torture, Human Rights Watch said today. It was the fourth detainee death reported by the Bahrain government in nine days.

At Fakhrawi's funeral on April 13 in Manama's Hoora district, a crowd of mourners demanded to see his corpse because of concerns he had been tortured. They wrestled the shrouded body from pallbearers on the way to the cemetery, and took videos and photographs of the body.

"Four detainee deaths in nine days is a crime, not a coincidence," said Joe Stork, deputy Middle East director at Human Rights Watch. "The government tells families of detainees nothing about their whereabouts or well-being while they are alive or about the circumstances of their deaths."

Fakhrawi, 49, had been detained since April 3, after he went to the Exhibition Centre police station to complain about a predawn police raid on the house of a relative, one of two nephews who were being sought by the police. The photos of Fakhrawi's body show a red area on each of his upper arms to his shoulders, similarly discolored areas on his legs, and what appears to be blood on the right side of his neck. Human Rights Watch did not see the body. The Bahrain News Agency, in a Tweet, said an official at the military's Bahrain Defense Force Hospital "confirmed the death of Kareem Fakhrawi was from kidney failure."

The government has provided no information whatsoever about the numbers of detainees since the beginning of anti-government demonstrations in Bahrain on February 14 or the reasons for their detention, Human Rights Watch said.

As of April 6, the Wifaq National Islamic Society, an opposition political group, had gathered the names of 430 detainees from families who reported the detentions. Fakhrawi was a founding member of Wifaq, society officials said.

"Bahrain is flagrantly violating the most basic human rights by arbitrarily detaining hundreds, keeping their whereabouts secret, and covering up the reasons for deaths in custody," Stork said.

In the case of Isa Ibrahim Ali Saqer, 31, a "Cause of Death" notification issued on April 9 from the Bahrain Defense Force hospital said he died of "hypovolemic shock," usually caused by excess loss of blood, after "multiple trauma." He had turned himself in to the police in Hamad Town on April 3 after the police came looking for him at his home. Human Rights Watch viewed Saqer's body and saw bluish patches on the left side of the head, blackened tops of feet, lacerations on the arms and legs, and what appeared to be lash marks all over his back.

On April 3, the government announced the death of Hassan Jassim Mohammed Maki, 39, officially attributing it to complications from sickle cell anemia. Masked police had arrested him at his home in Karzakan on March 28. On April 9, the government said that Zakaria Rashid Hassan al-Asherri, 40, had also died of sickle cell anemia. Police had arrested him at his home in Dair on April 2.

The families of both Maki and al-Asherri told Human Rights Watch they doubted the official diagnoses. Both men were carriers of sickle cell, but had never displayed symptoms. None of the four families had been able to get any information about the detainees following their arrests and detention by the authorities.

At the ritual cleansing before Fakhrawi's burial at the cemetery in Hoora on April 13, male relatives told mourners not to photograph the body. Family members said that officials at Salmaniya Hospital, where they retrieved the body, told them neither to allow the body to be viewed nor to permit photographs to be taken of the dead man. Female relatives protested the prohibition because they suspected

Fakhrawi's body had signs of physical abuse. Eventually, the women were let into the cleansing area and allowed briefly to see the corpse.

Since March 15, at least three other people connected to the anti-government protests have [died in custody under suspicious circumstances](#).

The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which Bahrain ratified in 1998, requires that anyone arrested shall be promptly informed of any charges and brought before a judge or other judicial authority. The refusal of the authorities to acknowledge a person's detention or provide information on their fate or whereabouts is an enforced disappearance, a violation of several international standards.

In accordance with the United Nations Principles on the Effective Prevention and Investigation of Extra-Legal, Arbitrary and Summary Executions, all suspected cases of unlawful killings, including in response to complaints by relatives and reliable reports, should have a "thorough, prompt and impartial investigation." This investigation should "determine the cause, manner and time of death, the person responsible, and any pattern or practice which may have brought about that death." The investigation should result in a publicly available written report.

Since March 15, Bahrain has operated under martial law, officially labeled a "State of National Safety," that gave authorities wide powers of arrest, censorship, and prohibitions on freedom of movement and association. Even during a state of emergency, certain fundamental rights - such as the right to life and the right to be secure from torture and other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment - must always be respected, Human Rights Watch said.

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