

Human Rights Watch

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

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2011/02/24/bahrain-ensure-rights-freed-political-prisoners>

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Release of 23 Opposition Activists a Positive Move

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CORRECTION:

At the time of publication Human Rights Watch indicated that an informed source had told the organization that prior to their release, the authorities had "demanded that each [of the detainees] sign a document promising to refrain from criticizing the government after they had been released, but that all refused to do so." Human Rights Watch has since had the opportunity to further investigate this claim and cannot verify its validity.

(New York) - Bahrain's release of 23 political prisoners is a positive move, but the authorities need to respect their rights to engage in peaceful political activity, Human Rights Watch said today.

Authorities freed dozens of prisoners early on February 23, 2011, including 23 opposition activists who had been charged with a range of national security-related offenses - the so-called "terrorist network" cases. Most, if not all, of the 23 appear to have been arrested and charged as a result of their writings or peaceful political activities, Human Rights Watch said. A person in contact with the detainees told Human Rights Watch that authorities demanded that each sign a document promising to refrain from criticizing the government after they had been released, but that all refused to do so.

"Bahraini authorities should ensure that the 23 freed prisoners are genuinely free," said Joe Stork, deputy Middle East and North Africa director at Human Rights Watch. "Releasing people held unjustly means letting them return to their political activities."

A Bahraini lawyer told Human Rights Watch that the 23 released detainees have an uncertain legal status because their release was not contingent on either an amnesty or bail. Human Rights Watch called on the government to drop politically motivated charges against them immediately.

In a government statement on February 22, King Hamad al-Khalifa called on all citizens to cease public protests. The Bahraini daily *Al-Watan* quoted King Hamad as saying that "public venues are not the appropriate place for national dialogue" and said that he instead called on people to sit at the negotiating table.

"The arrest of these 23 appeared from the start to be an effort to stifle and punish dissent," Stork said. "While we welcome their release, any attempt to harass or intimidate them and others who criticize the government or ruling family will undermine efforts toward real reform."

Morocco's Playbook to Crush Dissent

How the United Arab Emirates Silenced its Most Famous Human Rights Activist

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