

NGOs Call for the Immediate Release of Al-Wefaq General-Secretary Shaikh Ali Salman

On 28 December 2014, Bahraini authorities arrested Shaikh Ali Salman, Secretary-General of Al-Wefaq Political Society. The Bahrain Center for Human Rights (BCHR), Americans for Democracy for Human Rights in Bahrain (ADHRB), and the Bahrain Institute for Rights and Democracy (BIRD) strongly condemn the Bahraini government's detention of Shaikh Salman for his peaceful political activities and his work as a leader of the largest opposition political party in Bahrain. The undersigned NGOs are extremely concerned for the well-being of Shaikh Salman, and fear that his arrest will lead to the further deterioration of the human rights situation and may strengthen extremism in the country.

On the morning of 28 December, Shaikh Ali Salman went to the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) after receiving a [summons](#) from the Ministry of Interior (MOI) following the conclusion of Al-Wefaq's General Assembly conference, which the MOI had banned. On the morning of 28 December, Shaikh Salman went to the Criminal Investigation Department (CID), where he was arrested and interrogated. The CID refused his lawyers entry twice before eventually granting one lawyer access to Shaikh Salman's interrogation. Shaikh Ali Salman and his lawyer were told that the CID would transfer him to the Office of the Public Prosecution. However, according to available information, he was never taken to the Public Prosecution and the MOI has [ordered](#) his ongoing detention.

Shaikh Ali Salman's lawyers [stated](#) that he is accused of inciting hatred against the government, calling for the government the regime using force, religiously sanctioning youths to disobey the government, insulting the judiciary and the executive power, inciting hatred against an unspecified group of people, seeking external support, broadcasting false information and news that may cause panic, and breaching security and participating in gatherings and protests causing economic harm.

"The silence of the international community contributed to the arrest of Shaikh Ali Salman, as it also contributes to the deteriorating human rights situation in Bahrain," said BCHR President Nabeel Rajab. "With this high-profile arrest, however, the Government of Bahrain has gone too far in targeting its peaceful critics."

Al-Wefaq, along with other opposition parties, boycotted parliamentary elections that took place earlier this year. The political society last participated in parliamentary elections in 2010, when it won 18 of the 40 seats in parliament and more than 60% of votes. However, the 18 Members of Parliament aligned with al-Wefaq resigned in 2011 in response to the Bahraini government's violent response to protesters. Since then, government authorities have repeatedly targeted Al-Wefaq Society and its members for their political opposition and human rights activism.

The Bahraini government has been targeting Al-Wefaq Society members for their political views and human rights activism for years. In 2011, former Al-Wefaq Members of Parliament Matar Matar and Jawad Fairouz were arrested, tortured and detained for months after their resignation. In 2013, authorities arrested Khalil al-Marzooq, the Deputy Secretary-General of Al-Wefaq, and imposed a ban on his travel after he delivered a public speech criticizing the government. Most recently, Sayed Jameel Kadhem, head of Al-Wefaq's Shura Council, was taken to court over comments he posted on the social

media website Twitter regarding corruption during the elections, while two other Al-Wefaq members had their citizenship revoked by the authorities.

“Earlier this month, Britain announced that it will be building a naval base in Bahrain, which the Government of Bahrain is bankrolling,” said Sayed Ahmed Al-Wadaei, Director of Advocacy at BIRD. “The UK’s support for the Government of Bahrain, despite the human rights situation and harassment of Al-Wefaq Society, has given the Bahraini authorities the green light to further attack political societies.”

This is also not the first time Shaikh Ali Salman has faced harassment by authorities. Shaikh Ali Salman was [summoned](#) for interrogation at least twice this year for practicing his freedom of expression. In July 2014, Tom Malinowski, United States Assistant Secretary of the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, met with Al-Wefaq members in the society’s headquarters. In response, the Government of Bahrain expelled Malinowski and filed a lawsuit against Al-Wefaq, again summoning Shaikh Salman and al-Marzooq for interrogation. On 28 October, a court [issued](#) an order to suspend Al-Wefaq from performing any activities until it rectified the illegal status of its general assemblies.

“The international community and the United States must condemn the detention of Shaikh Ali Salman, for it is a clear sign of the Bahraini authorities disregard for the human and political rights of the Bahraini people,” said ADHRB Executive Director Husain Abdulla.

We, the undersigned human rights organizations, call on the United Kingdom, the United States, the European Union, and other national and international bodies to actively engage the Government of Bahrain to ensure that authorities:

- Immediately release Shaikh Ali Salman and all other political activists in Bahraini prisons;
- Drop all charges against Shaikh Ali Salman in relation to his or Al-Wefaq’s work; and
- Ensure that political societies and activists are able to conduct their work without retaliation.