

Human Rights Defender Mohammed Al-Maskati Sentenced to 6 Months in Prison

5 January 2015 – The Bahrain Center for Human Rights, Americans for Democracy and Human Rights in Bahrain, and the Bahrain Institute for Rights and Democracy express their strong concern regarding the 31 December sentencing of human rights defender Mohammed Al-Maskati to six months in prison. The charges against Mr. Al-Maskati are related to his internationally-guaranteed right to freedom of assembly, and are therefore illegal under international law.

Mohammed Al-Maskati is the former President of the Bahrain Youth Society for Human Rights and currently a digital security expert at Front Line Defenders. On 17 October 2012, he appeared before Bahrain's public prosecution on charges of participating in illegal protests in Manama. Although he has been released on bail pending appeal, he fears that the government may utilize the threat of re-incarceration to intimidate him away from performing his peaceful work as a human rights defender.

In the same trial, the government also sentenced human rights defender Nader Abdel-Imam to six months in prison. His sentence adds to another [six month prison term](#) he received in August 2014 for allegedly “insulting religious figures” in a post he published to his Twitter account. Prior to receiving his latest sentence, Mr. Abdel-Imam was scheduled for release in February 2015.

As a human rights defender, Mr. Al-Maskati has long been the subject of threats and harassment for his work. During the 21st session of the UN Human Rights Council in 2012, Mr. Al-Maskati participated in Bahrain's Universal Periodic Review, wherein he reported on the many of the human rights violations taking place in the country. After presenting his report, Mr. Al-Maskati received anonymous [threats](#), including one against his life. On 13 September 2012, Mr. Al-Maskati delivered an [oral intervention](#) before the Human Rights Council, informing member states of the reprisals to which he was subjected on account of his participation at the previous session. He stated, “I have received more than a dozen anonymous phone calls threatening my life and the safety of my family for my engagement here. Nonetheless, I have chosen to speak today because my case is not unique.”

Other human rights defenders like Mr. Al-Maskati have been the subject of heavy recent persecution in Bahrain. Abdulhadi al-Khawaja, the founder of the BCHR, is currently serving a life sentence in Bahrain for charges related to freedom of expression. Human rights defender and current president of the Bahrain Youth Society for Human Rights Naji Fateel is serving a [fifteen year sentence](#) on charges related to involvement in the opposition youth movement known as the 14 February Coalition. Maryam Al-Khawaja, Co-director of Gulf Center for Human Rights, was recently [sentenced](#) in absentia to one year in prison on alleged charges of assaulting a police officer during her detention in Bahrain last August, and her sister, human rights activist Zainab al-Khawaja has recently been [sentenced](#) to four years in prison on charges related to freedom of expression. The President of the BCHR, Nabeel Rajab, expects a [verdict](#) on 20 January in a case against him on charges relating to his peaceful exercise of his freedom of expression, and is still banned from travelling outside the country.

The BCHR, ADHRB and BIRD call upon the United Nations, the European Union, and all allies of Bahrain to pressure the authorities in Bahrain to:

- Immediately and unconditionally overturn all convictions concerning Mohamed Al-Maskati related to freedom of assembly and linked to his legitimate work as a human rights defender;
- Immediately and unconditionally overturn the convictions of all human rights defenders, and drop all charges against human rights defenders who are still on trial;
- Release all detained human rights defenders, and end the systematic targeting of persons legitimately working in the defence of human rights.