



## Bahrain Court Sentences Ebrahim Sharif to 1 Year for Peaceful Speech

24 February 2016 - Bahrain's fourth criminal court today sentenced leading opposition leader Ebrahim Sharif to one year in prison for allegedly "inciting hatred against the regime". We, the undersigned NGOs, strongly condemn the sentencing of Ebrahim Sharif today, which represents yet another example of Bahrain's criminalization of free speech. We call for Sharif's unconditional release and the release of the more than 3,000 political prisoners who have been jailed since 2011 for exercising their universal human rights.

Today's verdict comes in retaliation against a [peaceful political speech](#) on 10 July 2015 at the annual commemoration of Hussam al-Haddad, a 16-year-old peaceful protester [killed](#) by security forces in 2012. In his speech, Sharif reiterated his peaceful calls for reform, an end to discrimination in the country, and for the opposition to continue its peaceful movement as the only means to effect real change within and produce true dialogue with the government.

The Ministry of Interior [re-arrested](#) Sharif on 12 July 2015, just three weeks after his early release from prison, on charges of "inciting to change the country's political regime, and publicly inciting hatred and contempt against the regime." Today, the court found Sharif guilty of inciting hatred against the regime and sentenced him to one year. It acquitted Sharif of inciting the change of regime.

"Ebrahim Sharif's sentencing for a political speech is a slap in the face for Bahrain's allies who have tried to claim that Bahrain has taken steps toward reconciliation and human rights reform," said Hugh Ali, Executive Director of the Justice Human Rights Organization (JHRO). "His imprisonment for purely free speech charges shows that the government has no interest in upholding its international human right obligations."

This is not the first time Ebrahim Sharif, the former secretary-general of the secular opposition National Democratic Action Society (Wa'ad), has been targeted by the Bahraini government for his free speech. In 2011, in the midst of Bahrain's pro-democracy uprising, Bahrain's security forces [arrested](#) and tortured Sharif, holding him in solitary confinement for 56 days without access to a lawyer or his family. In June 2011, a military tribunal [sentenced](#) Sharif to five years in prison on charges almost identical to those that the court tried him of today.

The United Kingdom [stated](#) in October 2015 that they "continue to monitor" Ebrahim Sharif's case. In July 2015, following his arrest, the Foreign & Commonwealth Office stated that they urge Bahrain to ensure due process is followed.

“The UK needs to step up their rhetoric because due process is a meaningless call,” said Sayed Ahmed Alwadaei, Director of Advocacy at the Bahrain Institute for Rights and Democracy (BIRD). “Sharif should not be prosecuted for his peaceful speech. The case should have been thrown out of court and Bahrain should be shamed for these authoritarian moves. It is that simple.”

The US Department of State [cited](#) Sharif’s early release in June 2015 by royal pardon, after serving four years and three months, as a key [example](#) of Bahrain’s “meaningful progress” on human rights reform that led to the partial resumption of arms sales that same month. Following his re-arrest, however, the State Department has publicly expressed [concern](#) over his case and formally [called](#) for his release, most recently in commemoration of the fifth anniversary of Bahrain’s pro-democracy uprising.

“While the United States has been consistent on calling for Ebrahim Sharif’s release, it, along with the UK and the rest of the international community must do more to back up this rhetoric to end the never-ending merry-go-around of Bahrain’s jailing of opposition leaders,” said Husain Abdulla, Executive Director of Americans for Democracy & Human Rights in Bahrain (ADHRB). “Bahrain’s allies must stay true to their own rhetoric: there can be no real dialogue or national reconciliation in Bahrain while any of the political opposition’s leadership sits in jail, let alone the more than 3,000 others who languish in arbitrary detention on politically-motivated charges.”

Signed,

Americans for Democracy & Human Rights in Bahrain (ADHRB)

Bahrain Center for Human Rights (BCHR)

Bahrain Institute for Rights and Democracy (BIRD)

European Centre for Democracy & Human Rights (ECDHR)

Justice Human Rights Organization (JHRO)