



**INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL SUPPORTING
FAIR TRIAL & HUMAN RIGHTS** Registration No. 2795/2012

OFFICIAL LETTER HEAD OF THE ORGANIZATION

**ICSFT STRONGLY CONDEMNS THE UNLAWFUL LIFE
IMPRISONMENT OF SHEIKH ALI SALMAN**



Sheikh Ali Salman

ICSFT strongly condemns the politically motivated arrest and sentencing of Sheikh Ali Salman, Sheikh Hassan Ali Juma Sultan and Ali Mahdi Ali Al Aswad, and demands that Bahrain immediately drop all charges and release these prisoners of conscience. On 4 November 2018, the Bahraini appellate court overturned the acquittal judgement of the lower court and sentenced leading Bahraini opposition figure Sheikh Ali Salman and two members of the now-dissolved al-Wefaq Society, Sheikh Hassan Ali Juma Sultan and Ali Mahdi Ali Al Aswad, to life in prison for espionage.



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This decision comes just weeks before Bahrain holds elections for the lower house of parliament, and a month before Sheikh Salman was supposed to be released from prison after serving four years of a previous sentence.

The Bahraini government has been harassing Sheikh Ali Salman since 2014 when he was arrested and later sentenced to four years in prison on free expression charges relating to political speeches he gave in his capacity as Secretary General of the al-Wefaq political society. As he was getting close to his release date, the government brought a new manufactured case against him under the pretext of espionage for “spying for Qatar” in November 2017.

Although Bahrain’s High Criminal Court found Sheikh Ali Salman innocent of these politically motivated charges related to espionage, the Public Prosecution Office immediately appealed the verdict and overturned the acquittal to life sentence. Bahrain’s High Court of Appeals overturned the acquittal and sentenced Sheikh Ali Salman and his two co-defendants to life in prison. Additionally, the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention (WGAD) has adopted opinion Sheikh Ali Salman, finding his detention to be arbitrary. The Working Group cited both freedom of expression and due process concerns, requested for his immediate release and that he receive his enforceable right to compensation.

This is a clear illustration of how far the Bahraini government will go to silence and intimidate dissidents and political oppositions that demand real political and human



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rights reform in the country. In particular the government has effectively closed all political and civic spaces ahead of the upcoming election on 24 November to maintain the current status quo. Holding a fair and free election is not possible when the government has effectively dissolved organized political oppositions and arrested political figures, in addition to the ongoing crackdown against HRDs and activists. If nothing else, it's an extension of the fake reform rhetoric the government has been pushing as a response to growing criticism.

To date Bahrain continues to go through a political and human rights crisis. The government proclaims its commitment to real and meaningful reform and it claims that it has already made improvements that exceed those that were recommended by BICI and UN as a matter of urgency. In practice, however, serious violations continue to occur and do so on an extensive scale, and the sense of grievance among victims, their families and their community remains acute.

To add insult to injury, Bahrain's allies – the USA, the UK and other EU states – have generally refrained from publicly criticizing Bahraini human rights violations and have appeared to perpetuate the government's claimed commitment to reform at face value, all the while lending support for "institution-building and human rights training" and signing arms trade deals against the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT).

Further, there is widespread concern for the health and well-being of high profile human rights defenders and political leaders in Bahrain who are serving lengthy prison sentences in Jau Prison solely related to their political and human rights



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activities. Specifically they have been subjected to ill-treatment in detention, including being denied access to adequate medical treatment, having limitations placed on family visits, having their phone calls monitored and cut off, and being prevented from receiving medical treatment unless they are shackled, contrary to the UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners known as Mandela Rules.

The Government of Bahrain must not be permitted to arbitrarily imprison and abuse human rights defenders and political activists with impunity. ICSFT therefore urges governments', UN organs and other relevant stakeholders to continue to put pressure on Bahrain, demanding that the authorities provide humane treatment and proper medical care to all detainees, in line with international detention standards, and allow the prisoners to have access to due process and fair trial, and basic facilities, including access to meet their families. UK, USA, and other EU countries should use their leverage to pressure Bahrain to release prisoners of conscience, and ensure real political and human rights reform.

Of particular importance, ICSFT urges the international community to pressure the Government of Bahrain to permanently resolve these cases by immediately releasing, Sheikh Ali Salman, Sheikh Hassan Ali Juma Sultan, Ali Mahdi Ali Al Aswad, high profile political leaders and human rights defenders, and all other prisoners held solely for exercising their rights to freedom of expression, association, assembly, or belief.



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ICSFT urges the Bahraini government to move swiftly to institute genuine safeguards for the human rights of all Bahrainis, ensure proper accountability for human rights violations and comply fully with its obligations under international law and human rights treaties to which it is party.