

1 June 2017

Bahrain: Ebtisam Al-Saegh tortured and sexually assaulted in National Security Agency building

On 26 May 2017, human rights defender Ebtisam Al-Saegh was summoned by the National Security Agency (NSA) to Muharraq police station, in the North of the country. During her seven-hour long interrogation, she was sexually assaulted by the interrogators. She was also subjected to verbal abuse, and interrogators threatened to rape her if she did not put an end to her human rights activities. Ebtisam Al-Saegh was released at approximately 11.00pm and was immediately taken to a hospital.

[Ebtisam Al-Saegh](#) is a Bahraini human rights defender who works for the organisation **SALAM for Democracy and Human Rights (SALAM DHR)**, an NGO that works for democracy and human rights.

On 26 May 2017, at approximately 4.00pm, Ebtisam Al-Saegh presented herself to the NSA building in Muharraq, responding to a summons she received the previous day. According to the defender, for seven hours, she was beaten all over her body, kicked in the head and in the stomach. She was subjected to verbal and sexual abuse by the interrogators, who threatened to rape her if she did not put an end to her human rights activities. Ebtisam Al-Saegh was kept blindfolded and standing the whole time. The NSA also resorted to psychological torture by trying to pressure her into publicly announcing on Twitter that she would cease her human rights work and resign from SALAM when they threatened to target her husband or her children. During the interrogation, Ebtisam Al-Saegh was asked about the work of activists inside and outside Bahrain, as well as about her participation at the UN Human rights Council in Geneva in March 2017, where she spoke out about violations in Bahrain. She was also questioned about the events in Duraz, where security forces attacked an ongoing protest on 23 May 2017 killing five people, and about other human rights defenders she knew. When she was finally released at approximately 11.00pm, Ebtisam Al-Saegh was in a state of shock and unable to walk. She was immediately taken to hospital.

Ebtisam Al-Saegh has previously been harassed by Bahraini authorities. On 20 March 2017, she was [detained](#) for seven hours at Bahrain International Airport upon her return from the 34th session of the UN Human Rights Council. The human rights defender was thoroughly searched, interrogated for five hours and her passport was confiscated. On [22 January 2017](#), she was questioned prior to leaving Bahrain regarding a statement she had previously delivered against the use of the death penalty by Bahraini authorities. During that investigation, the interrogator had warned Ebtisam Al-Saegh not to “cross red lines”. She had already been [questioned](#) by the Public Prosecution office on 23 November 2016 in relation to content she posted on Twitter and was accused of inciting hatred against the Bahraini regime and threatening public safety and security. She was then banned from international travel for a period of time and permitted to travel once again after her interrogation on 22 January 2017.

The Bahraini government has stepped up its repression of human rights defenders and is now resorting to torture in order to force them to halt their activities. Other human rights defenders who were summoned by the NSA may have also been tortured or ill-treated in the last weeks. Some have since tweeted that they are stopping their activities. Human rights defenders in Bahrain continue to face

interrogations, criminal charges, judicial harassment and travel bans.

Front Line Defenders strongly condemns the torture and sexual abuse of Ebtisam Al-Saegh by agents of the NSA as well as the threats made against her and her family, which are directly related to her legitimate work in exposing human rights abuses in Bahrain. Front Line Defenders also calls on the Bahrain authorities to immediately end all further harassment of Ebtisam Al-Saegh.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Bahrain to:

1. Carry out an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the acts of torture and sexual assault against **Ebtisam Al-Saegh**, with a view to publishing the results and bringing those responsible to justice in accordance with international standards;
2. Take all necessary measures to guarantee the physical and psychological integrity and security of Ebtisam Al-Saegh, as well as of the members of her family;
3. Cease targeting all human rights defenders in Bahrain and guarantee in all circumstances that they are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions including judicial harassment.