

For Immediate Release

Bahrain: Don't Arbitrarily Revoke Citizenship

Thirty-One Deprived of Nationality Without Due Process, Leaving Many Stateless

(Beirut, November 8, 2012) – Bahraini authorities should rescind their announced decision to strip citizenship from 31 people for allegedly damaging the country's security, Human Rights Watch said today. The people affected included opposition political activists, lawyers, and rights activists. The order was imposed without due process of law and will leave the majority of the people affected stateless.

On November 6, 2012, the Interior Ministry issued a statement revoking the citizenship of the 31 people under article 10(3) of the Bahraini Citizenship Act of 1963 because they were “damaging the security of the state.” Article 10 provides that “the ruler” has the authority to revoke a person's citizenship.

“The Bahrain government's summary decision to deprive 31 people of citizenship seems to completely disregard their basic rights,” said Joe Stork, deputy Middle East director at Human Rights Watch. “There is no justification for equating political dissent with damaging Bahrain's security.”

Revoking citizenship without due process violates the rights of Bahraini nationals under international law, Human Rights Watch said. Article 15 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which is considered reflective of customary international law, states that, “Everyone has the right to a nationality” and, “No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his nationality.” Unlawful deportations may also violate other rights, such as the right not to be subjected to arbitrary interference with family life under article 17 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Bahrain is a party.

The Interior Ministry order affects former members of parliament, lawyers, activists, and religious clerics. At least 10 of them have lived outside of Bahrain for years. Defense lawyers and rights activists told Human Rights Watch that of the 31 only about six have other citizenship, and that the ministerial decision will make most of the people involved stateless.

One opposition activist told Human Rights Watch that most of the people affected “have not even been prosecuted for any criminal offenses, let alone damaging the security of the state.”

Taimoor Karimi, a lawyer whose citizenship was revoked, told Human Rights Watch that he only found out about the decision from the media. “I was not aware of any legal action taken against me and I have not been formally notified of the decision,” he said.

Karimi had last been arrested on March 31, 2011, during the period of emergency rule accompanying the suppression of the pro-democracy demonstrations. He spent nearly six months in jail on charges of “spreading false news” and “participating in illegal gathering.” In January a minor criminal court sentenced him to four months in prison for participating in an “illegal gathering.” His case is being reviewed by the court of

cassation.

Karimi said he was not a member of any political groups and did not have a second citizenship: “I was born and raised here. My parents and grandparents are from Bahrain. I have nowhere else to go.”

In the 1980s and 1990s the Bahraini government as a matter of policy forcibly expelled political dissidents. The most recent case, in 1994, was that of Sheikh Ali Salman, who returned to Bahrain in 2001 and is now the leader of the main legally recognized opposition society, Al-Wifaq.

The Interior Ministry statement said that “the affected persons have the right of appeal.”

“Bahraini authorities have been increasingly targeting opposition activists and this decision takes it to a new level,” Stork said. “The government should immediately rescind this decision, which denies people a fundamental connection to their own society.”

For more Human Rights Watch reporting on Bahrain, please visit:

<http://www.hrw.org/en/middle-eastn-africa/bahrain>

For