

Boy, 11, detained in Bahrain crackdown, rights groups say
By Samira Said, CNN
10 June 2012

(An 11-year-old boy has been detained by Bahraini authorities for nearly a month for allegedly participating in an "illegal gathering" and for burning tires, an arrest that human rights groups say comes amid the country's continued crackdown on anti-government protesters.

Rights groups on Saturday demanded the release of the boy, Ali Hasan, following news that Bahrain's Juvenile Court ordered the youth moved from a jail to a juvenile detention facility. Hasan was arrested on May 14 by Bahraini authorities for allegedly participating in an "illegal gathering" with about a dozen others, according to the Bahrain International Affairs Authority, the kingdom's information office. Specifically, the boy was involved with burning tires at a roadblock, the office said.

"The juvenile is receiving social care and tutoring at the center. He completed his last exam of the sixth grade level on Thursday," the information office said in a statement, which identified the boy as being 12 years old.

But an attorney for Hasan's family disputes the government account, saying the boy was playing with two other children in the street when he was stopped by police.

The attorney, Shahzalan Khamees, said that police stopped Hasan and two other boys, who managed to run away. Khamees said Hasan claims the police threatened to shoot him with a pellet gun if he ran.

The boy, according to Khamees, was then detained for questioning.

A second defense attorney, Mohsin Al-Alawi, said he recently visited Hasan and that the boy told him that he didn't take part in an "illegal gathering." The boy sobbed, said he is tired and wants to go home, Al-Alawi said.

The Bahrain Rehabilitation and Anti-Violence Organization, an Ireland-based rights group, demanded Hasan's immediate release.

There are a "growing number of children detained for investigation in security cases," the group said in a statement.

Meanwhile, the Bahrain Center for Human Rights expressed concern about the government's targeting of children under the age of 15 in its crackdown.

The rights group said Hasan, who they claim is 11, was the youngest detainee in Bahrain's prison system. The government did not immediately respond to the allegation.

Bahrain has been heavily criticized by rights groups for its crackdown on anti-government protests that began February 14, 2011, in the country -- spurred by popular uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt.

But the protests failed to gain the traction of other Arab Spring uprisings following a crackdown in February and then again in mid-March by Bahraini authorities -- backed by troops from Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

Demonstrators and Bahraini authorities have continued to clash, with the opposition accusing the government of being heavy handed in its crackdown on protests.

In November, Bahrain's Independent Commission of Inquiry issued a report highly critical of the crackdown.

The commission, set up by the king, concluded that police had used excessive force and torture during last year's crackdown on protests. The report recommended reforms to the country's law and better training of its security forces.