

9 April 2014

Third Anniversary of Arrest: Calls for the Release of Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja



International and Local Civil Society Groups Call for Immediate and Unconditional Release of Bahraini Human Rights Defender Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja on the Third Anniversary of His Arrest

The undersigned civil society organizations express their serious concern for the health and well-being of imprisoned Bahraini human rights defender Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja. Mr. Al-Khawaja was arrested three years ago today, on 9 April 2011, and continues to require medical attention for injuries sustained during his arrest and subsequent torture.

Former president and co-founder of the Bahrain Centre for Human Rights (BCHR), Mr. Al-Khawaja was sentenced to life in prison in June 2011 by a military court as part of a group of human rights activists and political leaders known as the Bahrain 13. We believe that Mr. Al-Khawaja is being unjustly persecuted for his legitimate human rights activity.

In its September 2012 decision, the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention concluded that Mr. al-Khawaja's arrest was due to his exercise of the fundamental rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly, and association. According to the Working Group, the charges against Mr. al-Khawaja—including membership in a terrorist organization—were “vague” and “raise doubts as to the actual purpose of detention.” The Working Group also concluded that throughout Mr. Al-Khawaja's arrest, detention, and trial, “the Government violated numerous international norms to the right to fair trial.”

The Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry (BICI) further concluded that Mr. Al-Khawaja was subjected to torture and inhumane treatment during his arrest and detention. Mr. Al-Khawaja was severely beaten, resulting in a broken jaw, and later spent two months in solitary confinement where he was subjected to physical, psychological and sexual torture. A full testimony from Mr. Al-Khawaja regarding his torture can be found [here](#).

Mr. Al-Khawaja continues to be denied adequate medical attention and suffers from severe medical complications as a result of his mistreatment in detention. Mr. Al-Khawaja has reported that he has cramps in his facial muscles from metal plates and screws that were set in his jaw after it was broken by security officials in four places in 2011. Mr. Al-Khawaja also continues to experience acute pain due to an injury to his coccyx sustained during torture in 2011.

Mr. Al-Khawaja and his family have repeatedly requested that the various operations he is in need of are performed by an independent doctor due to legitimate concerns about the impartiality of the doctor appointed by the Bahrain Defense Force Hospital, Dr. Al-Muharraqi, who in 2011 stated that Mr. Al-Khawaja was not subjected to torture. It is also deeply alarming that during his most recent examination, Dr. Al-Muharraqi informed Mr. Al-Khawaja that his entire medical file had gone missing from the system. Mr. Al-Khawaja's lawyers have been requesting a copy of his medical files since 2011, as it would serve as evidence of the multiple injuries and medical conditions caused by torture.

Despite his incarceration, Mr. Al-Khawaja and his colleagues continue to be the target of defamation campaigns. On the 27 February, 2014, a [12 minute video](#) published on YouTube accused Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja, activist Zainab Al-Khawaja, BCHR President Nabeel Rajab and BCHR Acting President Maryam Al-Khawaja of inciting terrorism, "taking the country hostage" and branding them as racists. The video included footage that could have only been obtained from official authorities, including the use of an interview with a police officer which requires the approval of the Ministry of Interior. The video unjustly targets the four human rights defenders as a result of their legitimate activities and could be seen to incite violence against them given the accusations presented.

In an attempt to test the legal procedures of combating defamation of human rights defenders in Bahrain, Mr. Al-Khawaja submitted a complaint to the Jaw Prison Administration which was then submitted to the Public Prosecutor in response to a degrading article about Mr. Al-Khawaja published on 28 May 2013 in the Gulf Daily News (GDN). In response, the GDN published [a letter](#) on 22 May 2013 accusing Mr. Al-Khawaja of "instruct[ing] rioters to attack military bases in Bahrain and is one of the master planners for an armed military coup." Nearly a year later, no steps have been taken to address Mr. Al-Khawaja's complaint.

The undersigned civil society organizations call for the immediate and unconditional release of Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja as well as immediate access to independent medical examination and treatment. In addition, we urge the Bahraini authorities to cease harassment and persecution of human rights defenders including unwarranted defamation campaigns.

The co-signed organizations are:

1. AMAN Network for Rehabilitation and Defending Human Rights
2. Americans for Democracy and Human Rights in Bahrain (ADHRB)
3. Bahrain Center for Human Rights (BCHR)
4. Bahrain Human Rights Observatory (BHRO)
5. Bahrain Human Rights Society (BHRS)
6. Bahrain Institute for Rights and Democracy (BIRD)
7. Bahrain Interfaith
8. Bahrain Rehabilitation and Anti-Violence Organization (BRAVO)
9. Bahrain Youth Society for Human Rights (BYSHR)
10. Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (CIHRS)
11. Canadian Journalists for Free Expression (CJFE)
12. CEARTAS – Irish Lawyers for Human Rights
13. CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation
14. European Bahraini Organisation for Human Rights (EBOHR)
15. Front Line Defenders
16. Gulf Center for Human Rights (GCHR)
17. Gulf Civil Society Associations Forum (GCSAF)
18. Human Rights First (HRF)
19. International Media Support (IMS)
20. Khiam Rehabilitation Center for Victims of Torture
21. Lawyers Rights Watch Canada (LRWC)
22. LuaLua Center for Human Rights (LCHR)
23. No Peace Without Justice (NPWJ)
24. PEN American Center
25. Pen International
26. The Arab NGO Network for Development (ANND)
27. The National Lawyers Guild International Committee
28. The Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders (OMCT-FIDH)
29. Tunisian Initiative for Freedom of Expression
30. Vivarta