

16-November-2016

Bahrain: Human rights defender Ghada Jamsheer remains in jail despite poor health

Women's rights defender, writer and blogger **Ghada Jamsheer** remains in jail in Bahrain serving a combined ten-month sentence for exercising her right to free expression on Twitter. On 7 November 2016, Jamsheer appeared before Judge Mohamed Al-Khalifa of the High Criminal Court of Appeal to request that she be freed to serve out the remainder of her sentences outside of jail due to health concerns, however the judge has not yet informed her of his decision.

The undersigned more than 20 rights groups from around the world call for the sentence to be overturned, as it violates her right to free expression, and for Jamsheer to be freed immediately so she can receive proper treatment for her debilitating rheumatoid arthritis.

Jamsheer, President of the Women's Petition Committee (WPC), is being held in connection with multiple sentences imposed relating to her tweets exposing corruption within the management of King Hamad Hospital, which is run by members of the ruling family.

Jamsheer was detained on 15 August 2016 upon arrival from London where she was receiving medical treatment for her arthritis. She reports that she needs medication to ease the pain but fears that she will risk her health if she takes the medication in jail, because it compromises her immunity. Jamsheer showed the Judge her medical reports, which have been translated to Arabic.

Following the hearing on 7 November, she was returned to Isa Town women's prison, where conditions are cold and unsanitary. She was told she would receive a decision within a week. The hearing was well-attended by lawyers and other observers, including a representative of the United States Embassy.

On 22 June 2016, Jamsheer was sentenced on appeal to prison by the Second High Criminal Court for four cases of defamation related to her tweets. She was originally misinformed that she was facing one year, but was told after her arrest in August that she is serving a ten-month term. She has now spent three months in prison this year, in addition to three months served when she was first arrested under the same charges on 15 September 2014.

Jamsheer has 12 charges against her related to this case. She was fined 10,000 dinars (approx. USD\$26,500) for defamation of the management of the hospital. In addition, she was also sentenced to one year in prison (suspended) on [trumped up charges of allegedly "assaulting a police officer" while in custody](#).

Jamsheer was featured in the [#SheDefends](#) campaign on 28 October, organised by the Women Human Rights Defenders Middle East and North Africa (WHRD MENA) Coalition. Over 250 people have called for her freedom by [signing a petition](#) in support of Jamsheer and women human rights defenders in Bahrain. Supporters are still signing the petition at

<https://action.manifesta.net/petitions/ask-the-king-of-bahrain-to-stop-persecuting-women-human-rights-defenders>

We, the undersigned organisations, call on the government of Bahrain to:

1. Immediately and unconditionally free Ghada Jamsheer;
2. Overturn the sentence against Ghada Jamsheer, which violates her right to free expression;
3. Immediately and unconditionally free all detained human rights defenders in Bahrain;
4. At the very minimum, ensure all prisoners, including Ghada Jamsheer and other human rights defenders, have access to proper medical treatment and ensure conditions in prison necessary to maintain health; and
5. End all forms of reprisals against human rights defenders and other activists, including travel bans, in violation of their rights to freedom of assembly and freedom of expression.

Signed:

Americans for Democracy & Human Rights in Bahrain (ADHRB)

Arabic Network for Human Rights Information (ANHRI)

ARTICLE 19

Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID)

Bahrain Institute for Rights and Democracy (BIRD)

Bahrain Center for Human Rights (BCHR)

Bahraini Organisation for human rights (EBOHR)

CIVICUS

Front Line Defenders

Gulf Centre for Human Rights (GCHR)

FIDH, within the framework of the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders

Brian Dooley, Human Rights First

Index on Censorship

International Service for Human Rights (ISHR)

Lawyer's Rights Watch Canada (LRWC)

Nazra for Feminist Studies

No Peace Without Justice

Reporters Without Borders (RSF)

Urgent Action Fund for Women's Human Rights

Women Human Rights Defenders International Coalition (WHRD IC)

Women Human Rights Defenders Coalition in the Middle East and North Africa (WHRD MENA) Coalition

World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT), within the framework of the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders