

URGENT APPEAL - THE OBSERVATORY

New information
BHR 004 / 0411 / OBS 070.2

Ongoing arbitrary detention /
Torture and ill-treatment / Judicial harassment

Bahrain

June 28, 2011

The Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, a joint programme of the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) and the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT), has received new information and requests your urgent intervention in the following situation in **Bahrain**.

New information:

The Observatory has been informed by reliable sources about the ongoing arbitrary detention and judicial harassment against Mr. **Abdulahdi Al Khawaja**, former MENA Director at Front Line and former President of the Bahrain Centre for Human Rights (BCHR), as well as about the alleged acts of torture and ill-treatment perpetrated against him.

According to the information received, on June 22, 2011, Mr. Al Khawaja was sentenced to life in prison for “organising and managing a terrorist organisation”, “attempt to overthrow the Government by force and in liaison with a terrorist organisation working for a foreign country” and the “collection of money for a terrorist group”, together with 20 other political and human rights activists by the National Security Court of Bahrain¹.

Following the reading of the verdict, Mr. Al Khawaja shouted that he “shall continue on the path of peaceful resistance” and was then beaten severely by court officers, mostly to his face that is still healing from other fractures. Later, Mr. Al Khawaja was allegedly brought to the Bahrain Defence Force (BDF) Hospital, as a result of these severe beatings. As of today, the family of Mr. Al Khawaja, who is detained in Gurain prison, has received no information regarding his current health condition.

After the reading of the verdict, Mr. Al Khawaja appealed against the decision. The appeal, initially scheduled at the beginning of July, will finally take place on June 29, 2011, seven days after the initial verdict.

The Observatory recalls that Mr. Abdulhadi Al Khawaja was brutally arrested on April 9, 2011, and witnesses present during his arrest declared that he was taken unconscious after having been violently beaten (See background information).

The Observatory firmly denounces Mr. Al Khawaja’s ongoing arbitrary detention as well as the non respect of his right to defence by unduly accelerating the judicial proceedings against him, which seem to merely aim at sanctioning his human rights activities, and urges the Bahraini authorities to immediately and unconditionally release him.

Background information:

On April 9, 2011, Mr. Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja, who has been organising peaceful awareness-raising and human rights education activities for protesters in the recent weeks, was arrested by masked policemen who forced entry to the building. Mr. Al-Khawaja was severely beaten up before being taken to an unknown destination. Moreover, Mr. Mohammad Al-Maskati, President of the Bahrain Youth Society for Human Rights (BYHRS), who has been

¹ See FIDH-OMCT Joint Press Release, issued on June 22, 2011.

monitoring human rights violations committed since the protest movement began, and who was also present in the house, was severely beaten during the raid but not arrested.

On April 20, 2011, Mr. Abdulhadi Al Khawaja was allowed to make a one-minute phone call to his wife. He informed her that he was supposed to appear on April 21 at 8.00 am before the Military Court. Before this call, Mr. Al Khawaja's daughter received a call from the military asking her to bring clothes for him. When his lawyers presented themselves before the Military Court, they were advised that the hearing will not take place on that date. They could not get any further information nor have access to their client.

During his detention, Mr. Al Khawaja was reportedly tortured and sexually assaulted. In a letter dated of June 16, 2011, Mr. Al Khawaja reported on his health condition to explain that he had suffered severe beatings subsequent to his arrest. Mr. Al Khawaja had to undergo several surgeries as a result of his injuries, which notably caused four fractures in his cheek bone and jaw. While in detention, Mr. Al Khawaja still suffered from the injuries and was only allowed a limited number of visits by his doctor.

Actions requested:

The Observatory urges the authorities of Bahrain to:

- i. Guarantee in all circumstances the physical and psychological integrity of Mr. Al Khawaja, as well as of all human rights defenders in Bahrain;
- ii. Release Mr. Al Khawaja immediately and unconditionally, since his detention and subsequent sentencing seem to only aim at sanctioning his human rights activities;
- iii. Carry out an immediate, thorough, independent and impartial investigation into the above-mentioned allegations of torture and ill-treatment, the result of which must be made public, in order to bring all those responsible before a competent, independent and impartial tribunal and apply penal, civil and/or administrative sanctions as provided by law;
- iv. Put an end to any acts of harassment, including at the judicial level, against Mr. Al Khawaja as well as against all human rights defenders in Bahrain;
- v. Conform in all circumstances with the provisions of the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, adopted on December 9, 1998 by the United Nations General Assembly, in particular its Article 1, which states that "everyone has the right, individually or in association with others, to promote the protection and realization of human rights and fundamental freedoms at the national and international levels", and its Article 12.2 which provides that "the State shall take all necessary measures to ensure the protection by the competent authorities of everyone, individually and in association with others, against any violence, threats, retaliation, de facto or de jure adverse discrimination, pressure or any other arbitrary action as a consequence of his or her legitimate exercise of the rights referred to in the present Declaration";
- vi. Ensure in all circumstances respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms in accordance with international human rights standards and international instruments ratified by Bahrain.

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Please also write to diplomatic representations of Bahrain in your respective countries.

Paris-Geneva, June 28, 2011

Kindly inform us of any action undertaken quoting the code of this appeal in your reply.

The Observatory, a FIDH and OMCT venture, is dedicated to the protection of Human Rights Defenders and aims to offer them concrete support in their time of need.

To contact the Observatory, call the emergency line:

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