

URGENT ACTION

PRISONER OF CONSCIENCE'S SENTENCE UPHeld

Bahraini activist Zainab Al-Khawaja's sentence to three months' imprisonment for participating in an "illegal gathering" was upheld by the Appeal Court on 9 May. She is a prisoner of conscience held solely for peacefully exercising her rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly.

In 2012 a Criminal Court in Manama, the capital of Bahrain, charged **Zainab Al-Khawaja** with "participating in an unauthorized demonstration" which took place in the Al Aali area on 26 November 2011. The sentence of three month's imprisonment was suspended however, following payment of 300 Bahraini Dinars (approx. 800 USD) and pending a ruling by the Appeal Court.

Zainab Al-Khawaja's new sentence will be added to the one she is currently serving - three months and 22 days imprisonment for "insulting an officer" in a military hospital - in Issa Town Prison for women. She is still being denied family visits for refusing to wear the prison uniform and this originates from her belief that the uniforms are worn by criminals and by wearing one she would be admitting guilt.

On 15 May the Appeal Court is due to issue its verdict in the case against her and fellow activist Ma'suma Sayyid Sharaf for "illegal gathering", "inciting hatred against the regime" and a further charge related to the alleged assault of police officers during their arrest in December 2011.

Please write immediately in Arabic or English:

- Expressing grave concern that Zainab Al-Khawaja is imprisoned solely for peacefully exercising her rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly, and urging the authorities to release her immediately and unconditionally;
- Urging the Bahraini authorities to quash her prison sentences and drop all the charges against her;
- Urging them to allow her immediate access to her family and lawyer.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 21 JUNE TO:

King

Shaikh Hamad bin 'Issa Al Khalifa
Office of His Majesty the King
P.O. Box 555
Rifa'a Palace, al-Manama, Bahrain
Fax: +973 1766 4587 (keep trying)
Salutation: Your Majesty

Minister of Interior

Shaikh Rashid bin 'Abdullah Al Khalifa
Ministry of Interior
P.O. Box 13, al-Manama, Bahrain
Fax: +973 1723 2661
Twitter: @moi_Bahrain
Salutation: Your Excellency

And copies to:

Minister of Justice and Islamic Affairs
Shaikh Khalid bin Ali bin Abdullah Al Khalifa
Ministry of Justice and Islamic Affairs
P. O. Box 450, al-Manama, Bahrain
Fax: +973 1753 1284
Email: minister@justice.gov.bh
Twitter: @Khaled_Bin_Ali
Salutation: Your Excellency

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country.

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date. This is the sixth update of UA 232/12. Further information:

<http://amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE11/008/2013/en>

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PRISONER OF CONSCIENCE'S SENTENCE UPHELD

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Zainab Al-Khawaja is the daughter of activist 'Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja, a prisoner of conscience. She was first arrested in December 2011, together with another activist, Mas'uma Sayyid Sharaf, and released a few days later. They were charged with "illegal gathering" and "inciting hatred against the regime" after police broke up a peaceful protest at a roundabout outside Manama using teargas and sound bombs. When the police arrested her she was the only person remaining at the roundabout and was sitting on the ground. Video footage of her arrest shows two women police officers handcuffing her and dragging her to a police car a few metres away, banging her head repeatedly on the ground. After her release Zainab Al-Khawaja told Amnesty International that once she reached the police station, in the outskirts of Manama, she was punched in the head and kicked; Mas'uma Sayyid Sharaf was reportedly kicked and spat on.

Zainab Al-Khawaja was most recently arrested on 27 February 2013 and is now serving a total of three months and 22 days imprisonment in 'Issa Town Prison for women. On 27 February the Appeal Court had upheld a one-month sentence, issued on 10 December 2012 by the Lower Criminal Court, for "entering a restricted area" (the Pearl Roundabout). Zainab Al-Khawaja had already served eight days of this sentence before being released pending appeal. The following day she was sentenced to three months' imprisonment on 28 February by the Appeal Court in the capital, Manama, for "insulting an officer" after she was initially acquitted of the charges on 2 May 2012. Zainab Al-Khawaja has been arrested and released several times since December 2011.

Among the recommendations accepted by Bahrain in the Universal Periodic Review of 2012 are those calling on the government to abandon restrictions on human rights defenders. Since then, however, human rights defenders and other activists in Bahrain have continued to be harassed, arrested and even imprisoned for their human rights activities.

Two years after the uprising in Bahrain, and beneath the fanfare of subsequent reform, prisoners of conscience, including some arrested during the protests, remain behind bars and the rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly continue to be suppressed. In recent months, not only have prisoners of conscience not been released, but more people have been jailed simply for daring to express their views, whether via Twitter or on peaceful marches. Bahraini courts have appeared more concerned with toeing the government's line than offering effective remedy to all Bahrainis and upholding the rule of law.

The Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry (BICI) appointed by Royal Order on 29 June 2011 was charged with investigating and reporting on human rights violations committed in connection with the 2011 protests. At the launch of the BICI report in November 2011, the government publicly committed itself to implementing the recommendations set out in the report. The report recounted the government's response to the mass protests and documented wide-ranging human rights abuses. Among its key recommendations, the report called on the government to bring to account those responsible for human rights violations, including torture and excessive use of force, and carry out independent investigations into allegations of torture. However, many of the government's pledges remain unfulfilled. The establishment of BICI and its report was considered to be a groundbreaking initiative, but more than a year on, the promise of meaningful reform has been betrayed by the government's unwillingness to implement key recommendations around accountability; this includes its failure to carry out independent, effective and transparent investigations into allegations of torture and other ill-treatment and excessive use of force, and to prosecute all those who gave the orders to commit human rights abuses. For further information see *Bahrain: Reform shelved, repression unleashed* (MDE 11/062/2012), November 2012, <http://amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE11/062/2012/en>.

Name: Zainab Al-Khawaja, Ma'suma Sayyid Sharaf
Gender m/f: both female

Further information on UA: 232/12 Index: MDE 11/015/2013 Issue Date: 10 May 2013