

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

PUBLIC STATEMENT

02 September 2014
Index: MDE 11/024/2014

Bahrain: Deep concern about arrest of Bahraini female human rights activist

Amnesty International is deeply concerned about the detention of prominent human rights activist, Maryam Al-Khawaja, in Bahrain. The organization fears she may have been targeted as a result of her human rights work.

Maryam Al-Khawaja, co-director of the Gulf Center for Human Rights and daughter of prominent activist and prisoner of conscience Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja, was travelling to Bahrain on Saturday 30 August. She is a dual Danish and Bahraini citizen and has been living abroad for several years. She was arrested upon arrival at Manama International Airport in the early hours of 30 August after she was searched by police officers and apparently refused to hand in her mobile phone. According to information published by the Public Prosecution on its twitter account and reports from the Bahrain News Agency she was arrested for assaulting a police officer after refusing to hand in her mobile phone while being searched.

Maryam Al-Khawaja was interrogated the same night by the Public Prosecutor in the presence of her lawyer in connection with this airport incident. She however refused to answer the questions from the Public Prosecution because she was not allowed to speak to her lawyer before or during the interrogation. Her lawyer requested to be granted the right to speak to his client but the request was rejected, so was his request for her release on bail and she was detained for seven days pending investigation. She denied all charges. She is currently being held at the 'Issa Town detention centre for women, south of the capital Manama.

The Public Prosecution also mentioned on its twitter account on 30 August that Maryam Al-Khawaja had been arrested in connection with a previous arrest order. However, during the interrogation, the Public Prosecution charged her solely with assaulting a police officer and there was no mention of previous charges. Both Maryam Al-Khawaja and her lawyer denied that she assaulted a police officer at the airport. Amnesty International would call for her immediate and unconditional release if she is being held solely for her right to freedom of expression, including her campaign to expose human rights violations in Bahrain.

Maryam Al-Khawaja was travelling back to Bahrain to visit her father, Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja. He started a hunger strike on 25 August in protest at his arbitrary arrest and detention. Amnesty International has adopted him as a prisoner of conscience and has called for his immediate and unconditional release after he was sentenced to life in prison during an unfair trial in connection with his role in the 2011 anti-government protests in Bahrain. The organization believes he is imprisoned solely for exercising his right to freedom of expression and assembly. The UN Working

Group on Arbitrary Detention concluded in May 2012 that Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja's detention was arbitrary and called for his immediate release.

Maryam Al-Khawaja's sister, Zainab Al-Khawaja, was arrested on several occasions between 2011 and 2014 and served a series of short prison sentences for an array of charges. They included "destroying government property", "insulting a police officer", "illegal gathering", "rioting" and "inciting hatred against the regime". Amnesty international adopted her as a prisoner of conscience as the organization believed that she had only been imprisoned for expressing her right to freedom of expression and gathering.