

# URGENT ACTION

## ZAINAB AL-KHAWAJA RISKS PRISON AFTER APPEAL

**Activist Zainab Al-Khawaja's three-year prison sentence for ripping up a picture of the King of Bahrain has been reduced on appeal to one year and a large fine. If she does not pay the fine, her prison sentence will be extended by a further 18 months. If she is imprisoned, she will be a prisoner of conscience.**

Zainab Al-Khawaja's three-year prison sentence was reduced on 21 October to one year and a large fine, by the High Criminal Court of Appeal. She had been sentenced for "insulting the King", for ripping up a photo of him in court in October 2014. If she does not pay the fine of 3,000 Bahraini dinars (BD) (approximately US\$8,000), her reduced prison sentence will be extended by a further 18 months. She was not present during the hearing. She is at risk of immediate rearrest. If imprisoned, she will be a prisoner of conscience, jailed solely for peacefully exercising her right to freedom of expression.

Zainab Al-Khawaja's family told Amnesty International that if she is imprisoned she intends to keep her baby son – just under a year old – with her while she serves her sentence.

The court also heard three other convictions which Zainab Al-Khawaja is appealing against: a four-month sentence for two separate cases, including two charges of "destroying public property" for ripping up photos of the King of Bahrain in May 2012, and a one-year sentence for "insulting a public official" after she spoke out in defence of another prisoner who was insulted and humiliated by a prison guard in June 2013. At the hearing, Zainab Al-Khawaja's lawyers told the court that they were withdrawing from the case at their client's request as she did not recognize the legitimacy of the court. The verdicts on the appeal will be issued on 3 December.

Zainab Al-Khawaja will also appeal on 17 November against a nine-month sentence for "entering a restricted area" and "insulting a public official" when she tried to visit her father in Jaw prison in August 2014, when he was on hunger strike.

### Please write immediately in English, Arabic or your own language:

- Urging the Bahraini authorities to quash all of Zainab Al-Khawaja's convictions, which arise solely from her peaceful exercise of her right to freedom of expression;
- Urging them to repeal all legislation that criminalizes the right to freedom of expression, and respect and protect this right.

### PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 4 DECEMBER 2015 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  
**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  
Email: info@interior.gov.bh  
**Salutation: Your Excellency**

**And copies to:**  
Minister of Justice and Islamic Affairs  
Shaikh Khaled bin Ali bin Abdullah Al Khalifa  
Ministry of Justice and Islamic Affairs  
P. O. Box 450, al-Manama, Bahrain  
Fax: +973 1753 1284  
Email:  
<http://www.moj.gov.bh/en/default76a7.html?action=category&ID=159>  
Twitter: @Khaled\_Bin\_Ali

**Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Please insert local diplomatic addresses below:**

Name Address 1 Address 2 Address 3 Fax Fax number Email Email address Salutation Salutation

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date. This is the third update of UA 306/14. Further information:  
<https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde11/1881/2015/en/>

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### ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Zainab Al-Khawaja has been arrested and released several times since December 2011 on an array of charges including “destroying government property”, “insulting a policewoman”, “illegal gathering and rioting” and “inciting hatred against the regime”. To date, she has spent almost 18 months in prison.

She was last arrested on 14 October 2014 for tearing up a picture of the King while appearing before a Lower Criminal Court in relation to two separate cases. During the hearing, according to witnesses, she took out a picture of the King of Bahrain from her handbag, tore it up and handed it to the judge, who ordered her arrest. She was released on 19 November following a court order and sentenced on 4 December to three years’ imprisonment and a fine of 3,000 BD (approximately US\$8,000).

She lodged an appeal against the sentence on 8 December. She was sentenced the next day to one year in prison for “insulting a public official” because she had verbally defended a fellow prisoner who was insulted and humiliated by a prison guard on 22 June 2013 in ‘Issa Town detention centre for women. The court also upheld her two previous two-month sentences for “destroying government property” when she had ripped up framed pictures of the King belonging to the Ministry of Interior on 4 and 6 May 2012.

Zainab Al-Khawaja was also sentenced to nine months’ imprisonment on 2 June 2015, for “insulting a public official” and “entering a prohibited area” when she sought to visit her father, Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja, in Jaw prison on 28 August 2014, when she was seven months pregnant. She was not present in court and paid bail of 500 BD (US\$1,300) pending her appeal hearing. Her father, a prisoner of conscience, was then on hunger strike. She told Amnesty International she had heard that he had collapsed in his prison cell and she was trying to visit him to find out how he was, as her family and his lawyer had called the prison but got no response. She said she had walked through the main prison gate towards the visitors’ building and saw no signs showing it was a restricted area and the prison guards did not try to stop her. At the visitors’ entrance, she was stopped by the prison guards who asked why she was there. She explained that she wanted to make sure her father was alive and well, but the guards told her she had no right to do so and started filming her. The guards were joined by the head of the prison and a female police officer, who ordered them to arrest Zainab Al-Khawaja. She said she told the officers that she was seven months pregnant, but they said they would take no responsibility for what happened to her or her unborn child. She said she was then held down on the ground, handcuffed and transferred to Riffa police station where she was told she had been charged with “entering a prohibited area”, “not cooperating with police orders” and “insulting a public official”. She was released later that day.

The authorities increased penalties for “insulting the King” in February 2014. The offence is now punishable by up to seven years in prison and a fine of up to 10,000 BD (about US\$26,500). The sentence could be tougher if the offence happens in the presence of the King. Under Article 214 of Bahrain’s Penal Code, “A prison sentence shall be the penalty for any person who offends the emir of the country [the King], the national flag or emblem”. This violates the right to freedom of expression.

Name: Zainab Al-Khawaja

Gender m/f: f

Further information on UA: 306/14 Index: MDE 11/2728/2015 Issue Date: 23 October 2015