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Jailed Bahraini activist Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja's life in danger

The Bahraini authorities must immediately and unconditionally release a prominent human rights activist whose health is rapidly deteriorating as he passes his 60th day of hunger strike, Amnesty International said today.

Amnesty International considers Al-Khawaja and 13 other prominent opposition activists held with him to be prisoners of conscience, held solely for peacefully exercising their rights to freedom of expression and assembly, and who have not advocated violence.

“These 14 men should all be immediately and unconditionally released – but instead the Court of Cassation has adjourned their appeal and denied them bail,” said Hassiba Hadj Sahraoui, Deputy Middle East and North Africa Programme Director at Amnesty International.

“In the case of Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja, this delay will have potentially disastrous consequences for his health, which continues to deteriorate as a result of his hunger strike. We hold the Bahraini authorities responsible for his situation.”

“Their single-minded determination to persecute him seems to override any consideration for justice or humanity.”

“At the very least, the authorities must immediately allow Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja's family and lawyer to visit him.”

Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja's wife told Amnesty International that he had been barred from receiving visits for the past four days.

They had last spoken on Friday evening, when he phoned her from the Bahrain Defence Force Hospital, saying he had asked to be transferred back to Jaw Prison after having difficulty breathing. He claimed that the nurses and guards at the hospital were not treating him well.

On Sunday, his family were turned away from Jaw Prison when they attempted to visit him, and his lawyer today had a visitation application denied.

On 2 April, the Court of Cassation started to review the verdicts against the 14 men, but adjourned the hearing until 23 April, when it is expected to rule. The Court rejected a request to release the prisoners on bail.

Last week, Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja was transferred from Jaw Prison – first to the Ministry of Interior's hospital in al-Qala'a, in the capital Manama, before being admitted to the Bahrain Defence Force Hospital.

Al-Khawaja, a former protection co-ordinator with Irish human rights NGO Front Line Defenders, was

arrested in April 2011 and accused of being one of the leaders of anti-government protests. He was tortured in custody and sentenced to life imprisonment by a military court in a grossly unfair trial last June.

Bahraini authorities did not allow two Front Line officials to visit him in hospital during their mission to Bahrain last week. Large demonstrations were organized in Bahrain last Friday to demand Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja's release.