

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT

Date 17 January 2022 Index number: MDE 11/5166/2022

BAHRAIN: REQUEST FOR SUPPORT TO FREE IMPRISONED HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDER DR ABDULJALIL ALSINGACE, ON HUNGER STRIKE SINCE JULY 2021

We, the undersigned human rights organisations, are writing to call for the immediate and unconditional release of respected Bahraini academic, blogger, and human rights defender, Dr Abduljalil AlSingace, who is serving a life sentence for his peaceful role in Bahrain's 2011 uprising. He turned 60 on 15 January 2022 and has been in prison for over a decade in violation of his rights to freedom of expression and assembly.

We are further concerned that Dr AlSingace has been on hunger strike for over 190 days since 8 July 2021 to protest the confiscation of his academic research on Bahraini culture. In addition to the health consequences of not eating solid food for nearly six months, Dr AlSingace also suffers from chronic medical conditions including post-polio syndrome, requiring crutches or a wheelchair since birth.

Accordingly, we kindly urge you to take immediate and appropriate measures to raise Dr AlSingace's case with the Bahraini authorities at your earliest convenience.

Other human rights defenders and activists in prison include dual national Danish-Bahraini human rights defender Abdulhadi AlKhawaja and Swedish-Bahraini Sheikh Mohamed Habib AlMuqdad, as well as the Secretary-General of the dissolved Al-Wefaq National Islamic Society (Al-Wefaq), Sheikh Ali Salman, Abdulwahab Husain, Hasan Mushaima, Ali AlHajee, and human rights defender Naji Fateel.

Last November marked ten years since the publication of the government-commissioned Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry (BICI), which revealed shocking accounts of torture, military trials of civilians, and state-sanctioned killings. The report noted that "many detainees were subjected to torture and other forms of physical and psychological abuse while in custody".

The BICI report documented how police subjected Dr AlSingace to nightly beatings for two months while placed in solitary confinement, how authorities targeted his disability by confiscating his crutches, making him "stand on one leg for prolonged periods" and, horrifically, pushing his crutch "into his genitals", and how authorities "threatened him with rape and made sexually explicit comments about his wife and his daughter".

The Bahraini King vowed to implement its recommendations in 2011. More than a decade later, this promise has yet to be fulfilled; no senior officials have been held accountable and those subjected to torture still languish unlawfully behind bars.

Dr AlSingace began his hunger strike on 8 July 2021 to protest the confiscation by prison authorities of an apolitical book on Bahraini dialects that he spent the last four years researching and writing. He has now been on hunger strike for more than 190 days, most of which he has spent in a hospital due to his deteriorating health.

In July 2021, the Bahrain Ministry of Interior Ombudsperson declared that AlSingace's work could not be given to his family until a "legal decision" was made. In November 2021, a legal decision clarified the apolitical nature of the book. Despite this determination, Dr AlSingace's research remains in the hands of authorities and as a result, he has continued his hunger strike.

Towards the end of November 2021, authorities arbitrarily suspended Dr AlSingace's weekly video calls to his family. In response, Dr AlSingace escalated his hunger strike by refusing to take IVs, supplementary vitamins, and oral medication. Family members report that he has since lost a considerable amount of weight, appearing even more fragile and pale. His sugar levels remain low and his immunity is weakened due to a low white blood cell count.

Despite Dr AlSingace also suffering from medical conditions including severe intermittent headaches, a prostate problem, arthritis in his shoulder joint, tremors, numbness, and diminished eyesight, he has not received the expected medical care. Dr AlSingace reports that he has still not been informed of the outcome of an MRI scan taken over two months ago and that no progress has been made on giving him a CT scan as requested by his doctor.

Dr AlSingace's numerous requests to receive adequate medical treatment whilst in a medical facility have been repeatedly ignored in spite of his fragile condition; this rejection amounts to deliberate failure to provide medical treatment in line with Bahrain's obligations under international law.

According to an expert opinion by the US-based Dr Qasim Omran, despite being detained in the Kanoo Medical Centre medical facility, Dr AlSingace is receiving treatment that is "not [...] appropriat[e]". Prison authorities are refusing his previous requests for painkillers and for over two months, Dr AlSingace has been excluded from daily medical check-ups by his doctor, the on-duty doctors, and the chief nurse, except in rare emergency situations.

Hunger striking prisoners must be able to effectively exercise their right to health. They should have adequate access to qualified health professionals providing health care in compliance with medical ethics, including the principles of confidentiality, autonomy, and informed consent. A person's hunger strike must not prejudice any other aspect of their health care.

Over the past decade, there has been an international consensus calling for the release of Dr AlSingace. More recently, on 22 June 2021, Mary Lawlor, the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders issued a statement raising alarm at the prolonged imprisonment of Dr AlSingace and calling for his release along with other human rights defenders imprisoned in Bahrain. Since Dr AlSingace's hunger strike, similar calls have been made by members of the UK and EU Parliaments, Members of the US Congress, 16 leading international NGOs, and over 100 global academics.

The prolonged and arbitrary confiscation of Dr AlSingace's book is an unjust punishment and Bahraini authorities must ensure the protection of his rights, including the return of his intellectual property and the resumption of his weekly video calls to his family.

We urge you to call for Dr AlSingace's immediate and unconditional release, for his work to be immediately handed over to his family, and for the release of all those imprisoned for exercising their rights to freedom of association, peaceful assembly, opinion and expression, including human rights defenders, opposition activists, and journalists.

Please consider taking the following urgent actions:

- Raise concerns with your Bahraini counterparts over Dr AlSingace's inadequate medical treatment and their failure to give his confiscated research to his family;
- Raise your concerns through relevant diplomatic channels;
- Make public and private representations, including posts on social media to raise the profile of this case and push for a resolution.

Yours sincerely,

1. Americans for Democracy & Human Rights in Bahrain (ADHRB)
2. Amnesty International
3. Bahrain Centre for Human Rights (BCHR)
4. Bahrain Institute for Rights and Democracy (BIRD)
5. Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies
6. CIVICUS
7. Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ)
8. Danish PEN
9. Democracy for the Arab World Now (DAWN)
10. English PEN
11. European Centre for Democracy and Human Rights (ECDHR)
12. FIDH, within the framework of the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders
13. Gulf Centre for Human Rights (GCHR)

14. Human Rights First
15. Human Rights Sentinel
16. IFEX
17. International Service for Human Rights (ISHR)
18. MENA Rights Group
19. No Peace Without Justice (NPWJ)
20. PEN America
21. PEN Canada
22. PEN International
23. Project on Middle East Democracy (POMED)
24. REDRESS
25. Scholars at Risk
26. Vigilance for Democracy and the Civic State
27. World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT), within the framework of the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders