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JOINT LETTER TO BIDEN ADMINISTRATION ON URGENT CONCERN FOR LIFE OF IMPRISONED RIGHTS DEFENDER ABDULHADI AL-KHAWAJA

Ambassador Henry Wooster
Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for Near Eastern Affairs
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Ambassador Wooster,

We, the undersigned organizations, are writing with urgent concern for the life of Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja, a 62-year-old prominent Bahraini-Danish human rights defender who is currently on a hunger strike to protest his unjust imprisonment and the continued denial of urgent medical care he has been subjected to while detained. As his health rapidly deteriorates, we urge the U.S. government to press the Bahraini authorities for his immediate and unconditional release.

Al-Khawaja, the co-founder of both the Gulf Centre for Human Rights and the Bahrain Center for Human Rights, has been unjustly imprisoned for 12 years. He was arrested in 2011 for his role in peaceful demonstrations during Bahrain's pro-democracy uprising and is currently serving a life sentence in Bahrain. Al-Khawaja's health has deteriorated significantly during his imprisonment. He has been subjected to severe physical, sexual, and psychological torture.

Prison authorities have repeatedly failed to provide or allow Al-Khawaja access to adequate medical treatment. In February 2023, Al-Khawaja experienced a cardiac arrhythmia; for several months, he was denied access to adequate medical treatment, despite continued cardiac problems and the risk of cardiac arrest.

On August 9, 2023, Al-Khawaja initiated a hunger strike alongside hundreds of other inmates demanding better conditions in Jau Rehabilitation and Reform Center. Two days later, on August 11, he was rushed to the intensive care unit of a Bahraini military hospital due to serious cardiac problems. The attending doctor stressed the imminent danger to Al-Khawaja's life and administered an intravenous injection until his heart rate stabilized.

Al-Khawaja was then returned to prison, where he has continued his hunger strike. He continues to require urgent and adequate medical care, which prison authorities are failing to provide. According to an independent doctor consulting for the family and who is knowledgeable about Al-Khawaja's case and health, he may not survive for more than a few days given his deteriorating condition, chronic health issues, and the potential for sudden, fatal cardiac arrest.

Respect for human rights is inextricably linked to U.S. national security interests, and the ongoing detention and possible death of a prominent Bahraini human rights defender in state custody threatens those interests. Al-Khawaja's precarious situation demands an urgent response.

We respectfully request that the United States leverage its close security partnership and urge Bahraini authorities to release Al-Khawaja immediately and unconditionally, and in the meantime, ensure he is provided with life-saving medical care to prevent an imminent tragedy.

We appreciate your time and attention to this urgent matter.

Sincerely,

ActionAid Denmark
Americans for Democracy & Human Rights in Bahrain (ADHRB)
Amnesty International
Bahrain Institute for Rights and Democracy (BIRD)
Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (CIHRS)
Democracy for the Arab World Now (DAWN)
#FreeAlKhawaja Campaign
Front Line Defenders
Gulf Centre for Human Rights (GCHR)
Human Rights First
Human Rights Watch (HRW)
International Service for Human Rights (ISHR)
Project on Middle East Democracy (POMED)

