

URGENT ACTION

ZAINAB AL-KHAWAJA'S APPEAL HEARING BEGINS

The appeal against Bahraini activist Zainab Al-Khawaja's three-year prison sentence started on 15 June and was adjourned until 13 September. If the sentence is upheld, she will be a prisoner of conscience. She has been sentenced to a total of five years and one month in prison.

The hearing of the appeal against **Zainab Al-Khawaja's** three-year prison sentence started on 15 June before the High Criminal Court of Appeal in the capital, Manama, and was adjourned until 13 September. She was not present during the hearing. She had been sentenced on 4 December 2014 for "insulting the King", after she ripped up a picture of the King of Bahrain when she appeared before the High Criminal Court of Appeal in relation to two separate cases in October that year. She paid bail of 100 Bahraini Dinars (BD) (approximately US\$265) pending her appeal hearing. If the sentence is upheld and implemented, Amnesty International will consider her a prisoner of conscience, jailed solely for peacefully exercising her right to freedom of expression.

Zainab Al-Khawaja had been sentenced on 2 June to nine months' imprisonment by a Lower Criminal Court in Manama 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. Her father, a prisoner of conscience, was then on hunger strike. Zainab Al-Khawaja, who was not present in court, paid bail of 500 BD (US\$1,300) pending her appeal hearing.

She had also been sentenced to one year's imprisonment for "insulting a police officer" and had her two previous two-month sentences for "destroying government property" upheld on 9 December 2014. She remains at risk of rearrest.

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 28 JULY 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 second update of UA 306/14. Further information:

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde11/0049/2014/en/>

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Though she was seven months pregnant, on 28 August 2014 Zainab Al-Khawaja sought to visit her father, Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja, who was on hunger strike in Jaw prison. She told Amnesty International she had heard that he had collapsed on the floor of his prison cell and she was seeking to visit him to get more information on his health after her family and his lawyer called the prison but got no response. She said that she walked through the main prison gate towards the visitors' building and saw no signs that indicated it was a restricted area and the prison guards did not try to stop her or tell her to keep out. At the visitor's entrance, she was stopped by the prison guards who asked why she was there. She explained that she wanted to make sure that 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 and ordered 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 officer". She was released later that day.

Zainab Al-Khawaja was sentenced in her absence on 27 January 2014 to four months' imprisonment for "destroying government property", as she had ripped up framed pictures of the King belonging to the Ministry of Interior on 4 and 6 May 2012. This sentence was upheld on 9 December. She was sentenced that day to one year's imprisonment for "insulting a police officer" because she verbally defended another prisoner who was insulted and humiliated by a prison guard on 22 June 2013 in 'Issa Town detention centre for women, south of Manama, where both women were held.

Zainab Al-Khawaja has been arrested and released several times since December 2011. She was arrested on 27 February 2013, and spent nearly a year in prison serving several short sentences for an array of charges. These included "destroying government property", "insulting a policewoman", "illegal gathering and rioting" and "inciting hatred against the regime". 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 and 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 2014 to three years' imprisonment and a fine of 3,000 BD (approximately US\$8,000). On 8 December, she lodged an appeal against the sentence.

In February 2014, the authorities toughened penalties for "insulting the King". 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 11/1881/2015 Issue Date: 16 June 2015