

URGENT ACTION

WOMAN ACTIVIST RE-ARRESTED IN BAHRAIN

Zainab al-Khawaja was arrested on 12 February for participating in a protest and has been charged with “illegal gathering”. She is currently in detention. Amnesty International is calling for her immediate release and considers her to be a prisoner of conscience.

Zainab al-Khawaja, a Bahraini activist, was arrested on 12 February while she was participating in a march towards the GCC roundabout (also known as Pearl Roundabout) in Manama, the capital of Bahrain. Shortly before her arrest, the security forces attempted to disperse the crowd with tear gas. Zainab al-Khawaja was arrested on the spot and transferred to al-Nu’aim police station in Manama. She was allowed to contact a lawyer after her arrest and on 13 February she was taken to the Public Prosecution Office (PPO) for questioning. She was questioned by a PPO official in the presence of her lawyer and has been charged with ‘illegal gathering of more than five people’ and ‘participating in an illegal march’. She was also given a seven-day detention order pending investigation.

Zainab al-Khawaja was previously arrested for participating in a public protest on 15 December 2011 alongside **Ma’suma Sayyid Sharaf**. She reported being beaten during her December arrest. Both women were later released but continued to face charges of “illegal public gathering”, “showing contempt for the regime” and “assaulting a police officer”. Zainab al-Khawaja told Amnesty International before her latest arrest that the charges against her have not been dropped and she faces a court hearing on 27 February

Amnesty International believes that Zainab al-Khawaja has been arrested solely for peacefully exercising her right to freedom of expression and assembly and therefore she should be immediately and unconditionally released as she is a prisoner of conscience and all charges against her should be dropped.

Please write immediately in English or Arabic:

- Express concern that Zainab al-Khawaja has again been detained solely for peacefully exercising her right to freedom of expression and assembly, and urge for her immediate and unconditional release and for all charges against her to be dropped as she is a prisoner of conscience;
- Urge the Bahraini authorities to ensure she is not subjected to torture and other ill-treatment while in detention and urge them to carry out an independent and impartial investigation into the allegations that she was beaten in December;
- Demand that the outstanding charges against Ma’suma Sayyid Sharaf be dropped.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 26 MARCH 2012 TO:

His Majesty the King
Shaikh Hamad bin ‘Issa Al Khalifa
Office of His Majesty the King
P.O. Box 555
Rifa’a Palace, al-Manama, Bahrain
Fax: +973 176 64 587
Salutation: Your Majesty

Minister of Interior
Shaikh Rashid bin ‘Abdullah bin Ahmad
Al Khalifa
Ministry of Interior
P.O. Box 13, al-Manama,
Bahrain
Fax: +973 172 32 661
Salutation: Your Excellency

Minister of Human Rights and Social
Development
Dr Fatima bint Mohammed Al Balooshi
Ministry of Human Rights and Social
Development
P.O. Box 32868, Manama, Bahrain
Email: pr@social.gov.bh
Salutation: Your Excellency

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country.

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date. This is the second update of UA 365/11. Further information: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE11/069/2011/en>

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Zainab al-Khawaja is the daughter of Abdulhadi al-Khawaja, a prominent opposition activist and human rights activist sentenced on 21 June 2011 to life in prison for his involvement in the protests in Bahrain (see UA 139/11). He alleges he was tortured in prison. His daughter Zainab al-Khawaja has been very critical of the Bahraini authorities when speaking to the international media about the crackdown on protesters and her father's unfair trial and treatment. Zainab al-Khawaja's husband was also sentenced in October 2011 to four years in prison for his involvement in the protests. In April 2011, Zainab al-Khawaja staged a hunger strike to protest against the arrest of her father.

On 23 November 2011, the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry (BICI), established by Royal Decree on 29 June to investigate abuses during the March/February protests and other abuses in the following months, issued its 500 page report.

Hundreds of cases of human rights violations were covered in the report, including beatings of protesters by security forces, mass arbitrary arrests of mainly Shi'a opposition activists and widespread torture, with five deaths resulting from torture in custody. At least 46 people have died in connection with the protests, including five security personnel. The report urged the Bahraini government to immediately establish an independent body made up of representatives of civil society, the opposition and the government; to oversee the implementation of the BICI's recommendations; to usher in legislative reforms to ensure laws are in line with international human rights standards; and to bring to account those responsible for abuses

Name: Zainab al-Khawaja; Ma'suma Sayyid Sharaf

Gender m/f: Both female

Further information on UA: 365/11 Index: MDE 11/007/2012 Issue Date: 13 February 2012