

URGENT ACTION

PRISONER OF CONSCIENCE DENIED VISITS BY FAMILY

Bahraini activist Zainab Al-Khawaja has been denied family visits since mid-March for refusing to wear the prison uniform during the visits. She is a prisoner of conscience held solely for peacefully exercising her rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly.

Dual Bahraini and Danish national, **Zainab Al-Khawaja** went on hunger strike between 17 and 29 March 2013 in protest against the prison authorities decision to deny her weekly family visits after she refused to wear the prison uniform. Her father Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja a prominent opposition activist also went on hunger strike in support of her protest. Zainab Al-Khawaja called an end to her protest due to the deterioration of her father's health and he too ended his action. According to her family the Consul of Denmark was denied access to her on 2 April.

On 17 March prison guards refused to allow Zainab Al-Khawaja's family to visit her unless she wore the prison uniform. Her refusal to wear the prison uniform originates from her belief that the uniforms are worn by criminals and in wearing one she would be admitting criminality. On the same day her father Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja, an imprisoned prominent opposition activist, was not allowed to see his daughter because he also refused to wear the prison uniform and started a hunger strike in support.

Zainab Al-Khawaja was most recently arrested on 27 February 2013 and is now serving a total of three months and 22 days' imprisonment in 'Issa Town prison for women. On 27 February the Appeal Court had upheld a one-month sentence, issued on 10 December 2012 by the Lower Criminal Court, for "entering a restricted area" (the Pearl Roundabout). Zainab Al-Khawaja had already served eight days of this sentence before being released pending appeal. The following day she was sentenced to three months' imprisonment on 28 February by the Appeal Court in the capital, Manama, for "insulting an officer" after she was initially acquitted of the charges on 2 May 2012. Zainab Al-Khawaja has been arrested and released several times since December 2011.

Please write immediately in English or Arabic:

- Expressing concern that Zainab Al-Khawaja has been imprisoned solely for exercising her rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly, and calling for her immediate and unconditional release;
- Urging the Bahraini authorities to allow her immediate access to her family and lawyer;
- Urging them to quash her prison sentences, drop all the charges and overturn all her convictions;
- Calling on them to stop all forms of harassment against her.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 15 MAY 2013 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
Twitter: @moi_Bahrain

Salutation: Your Excellency

Public Prosecutor

Mr 'Ali al-Bu'ainein
Public Prosecution Office
P.O. Box 450, al-Manama, Bahrain
Fax: +973 1753 0884

Salutation: Dear Mr 'Ali al-Bu'ainein,

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Please insert local diplomatic addresses below:

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date. This is the fifth update of UA 232/12. Further information:

<http://amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE11/006/2013/en>

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Zainab Al-Khawaja is the daughter of activist 'Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja, a prisoner of conscience. She was first arrested in December 2011, together with another activist, Mas'uma Sayyid Sharaf, and released a few days later. They were charged with "illegal gathering" and "inciting hatred against the regime" after police broke up a peaceful protest at a roundabout outside Manama using teargas and sound bombs. When the police arrested her she was the only person remaining at the roundabout and was sitting down. Video footage of her arrest shows two women police officers handcuffing her and dragging her along the ground to a police car a few metres away, banging her head repeatedly on the ground. After her release Zainab Al-Khawaja told Amnesty International that once she reached the police station, on the outskirts of Manama, she was punched in the head and kicked; Mas'uma Sayyid Sharaf was kicked and spat on.

Zainab Al-Khawaja was arrested again on 21 April 2012, after staging a sit-down protest on a highway close to the Financial Harbour area in protest at her father's detention and the general poor human rights situation in Bahrain. She was released on 29 May after paying a fine of 200 Bahrain dinars (around US\$530) for "insulting a police officer". On 28 June she was injured while monitoring police behaviour during a protest. She was rearrested on 2 August and sentenced at the end of the month to two months' imprisonment for "destroying public property" after she tore up a picture of the King. She was released again on bail on 2 October pending other trials, but rearrested on 20 October and released on bail after some hours.

On 9 December she was arrested for holding a photograph of an injured protester while attempting to visit him at the Salmaniya Medical Complex in Manama. The Public Prosecutor's Office (PPO) launched an investigation against her for "inciting hatred against the regime" and twice extended her detention for this purpose. She was released on 27 December, but the PPO is continuing the investigation into the case.

Among the recommendations accepted by Bahrain in the Universal Periodic Review of 2012 are those calling on the government to abandon restrictions on human rights defenders. Since then, however, human rights defenders and other activists in Bahrain have continued to be harassed, arrested and even imprisoned for their human rights activities.

Two years after the uprising in Bahrain, and beneath the fanfare of subsequent reform, prisoners of conscience, including some arrested during the protests, remain behind bars and the rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly continue to be suppressed. In recent months, not only have prisoners of conscience not been released, but more people have been jailed simply for daring to express their views, whether via Twitter or on peaceful marches. Bahraini courts have appeared more concerned with toeing the government's line than offering effective remedy to Bahrainis and upholding the rule of law.

The Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry (BICI), appointed by Royal Order on 29 June 2011, was charged with investigating and reporting on human rights violations committed in connection with the 2011 protests. At the launch of the BICI report in November 2011, the government publicly committed itself to implementing the recommendations set out in the report. The report recounted the government's response to the mass protests and documented wide-ranging human rights abuses. Among its key recommendations, the report called on the government to bring to account those responsible for human rights violations, including torture and excessive use of force, and carry out independent investigations into allegations of torture. However, many of the government's pledges remain unfulfilled. The establishment of BICI and its report was considered to be a groundbreaking initiative, but, more than a year on, the promise of meaningful reform has been betrayed by the government's unwillingness to implement key recommendations around accountability; this includes its failure to carry out independent, effective and transparent investigations into allegations of torture and other ill-treatment and excessive use of force, and to prosecute all those who gave the orders to commit human rights abuses

Name: Zainab Al-Khawaja

Gender m/f: f

Further information on UA: 232/12 Index: MDE 11/008/13 Issue Date: 3 April 2013