

URGENT ACTION

ACTIVIST JAILED FOR 'INSULTING AN OFFICER'

Bahraini activist Zainab Al-Khawaja was sentenced to three months' imprisonment on 28 February for "insulting an officer" in a military hospital. She had been acquitted of this charge in May 2012, but the Prosecution had appealed.

Zainab Al-Khawaja was sentenced to three months' imprisonment on 28 February by the Appeal Court in the capital, Manama, for "insulting an officer" in a military hospital, overturning the verdict of the Lower Criminal Court which had acquitted her on 2 May 2012. The Public Prosecution had appealed the acquittal.

On 27 February, the Appeal Court upheld a two-month prison sentence against her for "destroying government property", in relation to an incident in which she tore up a picture of Bahrain's King while detained in May 2012. However, she has already served this sentence. The Appeal Court also 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. She is now serving a total period of imprisonment of three months and 22 days and is held in 'Issa Town detention centre for women.

Zainab Al-Khawaja had been arrested on 27 February while staging a peaceful protest at the acquittal of policemen charged with the killing of protesters, and at the authorities' refusal to hand the body of a protester to his family for burial in the cemetery of their choice. Mahmoud al-Jazeeri, 20, died in hospital on 22 February; he had been hit by a tear gas canister during a 14 February protest to mark the second anniversary of protests in Bahrain.

Please write immediately in Arabic, English or your own language:

- Expressing concern that Zainab Al-Khawaja is a prisoner of conscience held solely for peacefully exercising her rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly, and urging the authorities to release her immediately and unconditionally;
- Urging them to quash her prison sentences, drop all the charges and overturn all her convictions;
- Urging them to respect and protect the rights to freedom of expression and assembly and ensure that all human rights organizations and human rights defenders are able to carry out their work without hindrance, intimidation or harassment.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 15 APRIL 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 (keep trying)
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

And copies to:

Minister of Justice and Islamic Affairs
Shaikh Khalid bin Ali bin Abdullah Al Khalifa
Ministry of Justice and Islamic Affairs
P. O. Box 450, al-Manama, Bahrain
Fax: +973 1753 1284
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 fourth update of UA 232/12. Further information:

<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE11/069/2012/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. For further information see *Bahrain: Reform shelved, repression unleashed* (Index: MDE 11/062/2012), published in November 2012 (<http://amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE11/062/2012/en>).

Name: Zainab Al-Khawaja
Gender m/f: f

Further information on UA: 232/12 Index: MDE 11/006/2013 Issue Date: 4 March 2013