



PRESS RELEASE

for immediate release

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Bahrain National Day, 16th December, Free Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja – End the Violence against human rights defenders

On the occasion of the Bahrain's National Day Front Line Defenders renews its call for the release of human rights defender Abdulhadi Al-khawaja with the unveiling of a 2,500 square foot banner in St Stephen's Green in the centre of Dublin.

"It requires no commissions or lengthy deliberations to set free those who have been systematically tortured and denied a fair trial," said Front Line Defenders' Executive Director Mary Lawlor in Dublin today, as she called on King Hamad to free Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja, the organisation's former Protection Coordinator for the Middle East who was sentenced to life imprisonment after a grossly unfair trial during which the judge refused to deal with the issue of his brutal torture while in custody.

"Front Line Defenders is also deeply concerned at reports received today of excessive use of force against peaceful demonstrators during which Zainab Al-Khawaja, daughter of Abdulhad was arrested. We call for her immediate release", added Ms Lawlor.

This latest violent crackdown further underlines the urgent need for King Hamad and the Government of Bahrain to end the violent repression of human rights defenders and begin the process of reform.

King Hamad has made a commitment to implement significant political and social reforms in response to the findings of the Bahrain Independent Commission of Enquiry (BICI) report which confirmed the systematic torture of detainees and the denial of basic fair trial measures but there has been little progress on practical implementation until now.

“Front Line Defenders is calling on the King to release all human rights defenders currently in detention or facing charges on the basis of their peaceful activities,” said Ms Lawlor. “Sentences handed down against medical professionals following grossly unfair trials should also be quashed.”

Front Line Defenders welcomed the publication of the BICI report and the Bahraini Government's proclaimed commitment to implement reforms to end torture. The Government has replaced the Head of National Security and instigated investigations into the behaviour of some low level officials. They have also sought to appoint a National Commission to implement the recommendations of the BICI report, however, until now they have not been able to get broad engagement with this process.

The brutal repression of regular protests has continued. “The credibility of King Hamad's commitment to reform is undermined by the continued detention of human rights defenders whose sentences were based on confessions extracted under torture and secret evidence which was not made available to the defence lawyers for rebuttal”, said Ms Lawlor.

A case in point is the 28 November hearing in the proceedings against the doctors (three of whom trained in the Royal College of Surgeons in Dublin) who had been sentenced to prison terms of between 5 and fifteen years because of their work treating injured demonstrators was adjourned as the prosecution attempted to introduce new evidence for the prosecution in breach of all normal trial procedures.

“If King Hamad does not honour his commitment to reform his statements to date will be seen as mere public relations. The first step to establishing the credibility of his commitment is to order the release of Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja”, concluded Ms Lawlor.

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