

18 November 2021

### **Bahrain: Detained human rights defender Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja begins hunger strike**

On 16 November 2021, woman human rights defender **Zainab Al-Khawaja** sent out a series of tweets on her personal Twitter account revealing the health situation of her father, prominent Danish-Bahraini human rights defender, **Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja**, who is serving a life-sentence in Jaw Prison, Bahrain. It is reported by some family members that the human rights defender is on hunger strike in objection to having his right to make phone calls withheld.

[Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja](#) is a prominent human rights defender and former Front Line Defenders Protection Coordinator for the Middle East and North Africa, who is serving a [life sentence](#) which was passed following a grossly unfair trial. He is also the founder of Gulf Center for Human Rights (GCHR) and a member of the International Advisory Network of the Business and Human Rights Resource Centre, headed by former Irish President Mary Robinson. He has previously worked with Amnesty International, and was named as ‘Activist of the Year’ in 2005 by the Arab Program for Human Rights Activists.

On 16 November 2021, it was revealed by woman human rights defender [Zainab Al-Khawaja](#) that her father, human rights defender Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja who is serving a sentence in Jaw Prison, Bahrain, was starting a hunger strike to oppose the decision made by the prison administration to restrict his right to make phone calls. Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja has not been able to see his family and the phone calls were the only way for the human rights defender and his family to maintain contact.

This is not the first time that Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja has gone on hunger strike to protest the ill-treatment he has suffered in detention. On 29 January 2012, the human rights defender started an open-ended hunger strike to protest against his brutal arrest and detention, his torture while in custody, and the life sentence handed down after his unfair trial before a military court. This hunger strike lasted for 110 days and the human rights defender was reportedly drugged and force-fed through painful procedures.

Front Line Defenders urges the Bahraini authorities to allow Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja to have immediate and unconditional access to his family, and take all measures to guarantee his physical and psychological integrity and security. Front Line Defenders also urges the Bahraini government to immediately drop all charges against Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja and release him as it believes he is being detained solely as a result of his peaceful and legitimate human rights work.

#### **Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Bahrain to:**

1. Guarantee Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja immediate and unconditional access to his family members;
2. Immediately release Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja and quash his conviction as Front Line Defenders believes that he has been targeted solely as a result of his legitimate human rights work;
3. Provide the necessary medical treatment for Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja;

4. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in Bahrain are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions [including judicial harassment].

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