

April 9, 2012

Barack Obama
President of the United States of America
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Obama,

We write to urge you to publicly call on the Government of Bahrain to immediately and unconditionally release from prison Abdulhadi al-Khawaja. Al-Khawaja is a Bahraini human rights defender and democracy activist who may soon die, as he has been on a hunger strike for more than two months.

Al-Khawaja was arrested one year ago in the wake of popular protests against the Bahraini government, and sentenced to life in prison. While in detention, al-Khawaja suffered from torture and severe ill-treatment. As a result, he was admitted to the Bahrain Defence Force Hospital in April last year with a cracked jaw and skull requiring several operations on his head and face.

To protest his ongoing detention and mistreatment, al-Khawaja began a hunger strike on February 8. In an open letter to the King of Bahrain, al-Khawaja pledged to stay on hunger strike until “freedom or death.”

After being arrested in April 2011, al-Khawaja was sentenced to life in prison in June 2011 as part of a group trial of 21 activists and human rights defenders. This group was charged with a range of offenses related to their role in peaceful demonstrations in Bahrain in February and March 2011. International human rights organizations and the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry (BICI) have stated that the trials did not comply with international standards of due process, nor even Bahrain’s own criminal code, because the 21 civilians were tried before National Safety Courts, which are military courts.

The evidence is clear that al-Khawaja and others were sentenced in violation of their rights to freedom of expression, assembly and association, which are protected under international law. We are deeply concerned about the health of human rights defender Abdulhadi al-Khawaja, and respectfully request that the United States urge the Government of Bahrain to release al-Khawaja immediately and allow him to travel abroad, including for medical treatment, if he wishes to do so.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Human Rights First



AFL-CIO



Human Rights Watch



AFL-CIO Solidarity Center



Just Foreign Policy

Americans for Democracy and Human Rights in Bahrain



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Open Society Foundations



Amnesty International



Physicians for Human Rights



Citizens for Global Solutions

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