



## Americans for Democracy and Human Rights in Bahrain

888 16<sup>th</sup> Street NW, Suite 800 • Washington, D.C. 20006 • (202) 650-5530 • [www.adhrb.org](http://www.adhrb.org) • @ADHRB

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Dear Asian Football Confederation Congress Member:

On May 4, you will have the opportunity to elect representatives to the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) Extraordinary Congress, a body whose members represent the leadership of the AFC. The persons who fill these positions, most notably the president of the AFC, are expected to represent the values and interests of the AFC. In considering the candidates for president, we ask that you elect an individual whose ethics and integrity are compatible with the AFC's values. Unfortunately, the candidate from Bahrain, Sheikh Salman bin Ibrahim al-Khalifa, fails to meet those standards.

In February 2011, thousands of Bahraini protestors took to the streets to peacefully call for political reforms, taking part in a broader movement for democracy and dignity in the Middle East. Participating in the protests were [six football players](#) from Bahrain's national team, alongside nearly two hundred other athletes and staff from the sporting community. The Government of Bahrain responded to the protests with a brutal crackdown, killing dozens and arresting thousands. More than 150 athletes, staff, coaches, and referees throughout Bahrain were [suspended or fired](#) for expressing their free speech rights.

Bahrain's football players were not spared from the repression. [Under the direction](#) of Sheikh Salman al-Khalifa, head of the Bahrain Football Association and member of Bahrain's royal family, football players were arrested, detained, abused, tortured, and publicly humiliated. [Mohammed Hubail](#), who played on Bahrain's national team, was one of several athletes to be convicted and sentenced during closed-door proceedings before a pseudo-military court. Several other national team players, including Ala'a Hubail (Mohammed's brother), and Sayed Mohamed Adnan, were also punished for exercising their free speech rights.

In the two years since the uprising began, life has been anything but normal for Bahrain's football players. The International Federation of Football Association (FIFA) conducted an [investigation](#) into the attacks against players, which led to the charges against Ala'a and Mohammed to be dropped. However, because they and other football players remain [suspended](#) from their club teams, they are therefore ineligible to be considered for a spot on the national team. As a result, Mohammed and Ala'a have moved to Oman, where Mohammed [plays](#) for Fanja and Ala'a [plays](#) for al-Taleea. Sayed, whose cousin was shot and killed by security forces during the protests, [fled](#) to Australia, where he now plays for the Brisbane Road. However, other players still living in Bahrain who remain suspended are unable to continue their work as professional athletes.

The [AFC Code of Ethics](#) requires officials to uphold the organization's principles and ethical standards. Section 3.2 states that "officials ... shall behave and act with complete credibility and integrity," and section 8 requires officials to "respect and safeguard the personal rights of those persons whom they contact and with whom they deal." The actions taken against Bahrain's football players by the Bahrain Football Association, led by Sheikh Al-Khalifa, are hardly credible, are devoid of integrity, and fail to respect the personal rights of the players. As leader of the organization that led such abuses, Sheikh Al-Khalifa bears responsibility for what was done to these players. Yet, in response to recent questions about the arrest, detention, and abuse of Bahrain's football players, Sheikh Al-Khalifa [abdicated any personal responsibility](#) for the abuse. Sheikh Al-Khalifa's actions and attitude evidence a clear incompatibility with the AFC Code of Ethics. He should therefore be considered unsuitable for the position of AFC president.

In light of the abuses inflicted upon football players under the leadership of Sheikh al-Khalifa, as well as their ongoing suspension from the sport, we ask that you make the right decision by choosing not to elect Sheikh Salman bin Ibrahim al-Khalifa to the position of president of the AFC.

Sincerely,

Husain Abdulla, Director