



# 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

April 29, 2013

Mr. Joseph S. Blatter  
President  
International Federation of Football Associations (FIFA)  
FIFA-Strasse 20  
P.O. Box 8044 Zurich, Switzerland

Dear Mr. Blatter:

We write to bring to your attention allegations of unethical behavior by FIFA committee member Sheikh Salman bin Ibrahim al-Khalifa, in violation of FIFA's Code of Ethics. We request that such allegations be referred to the Chairman of FIFA's Ethics Committee for review and consideration for possible investigation.

Sheikh Salman bin Ibrahim al-Khalifa currently serves as a member of three FIFA standing committees: the Organising Committee for the FIFA Under-17 World Cup; the Bureau 2014 FIFA World Cup Brazil™; and the Organising Committee for the FIFA World Cup. Sheikh Al-Khalifa also serves as President of the Bahrain Football Association (BFA), a FIFA Member Association, and is currently seeking election to the position of president of the Asian Football Confederation (AFC), one of the several FIFA continental confederations. The concerns mentioned in the following paragraphs arise from incidents which occurred under Sheikh Al-Khalifa's leadership as head of the BFA. As described in detail below, such incidents appear to violate FIFA's Code of Ethics and therefore merit further investigation to determine Sheikh Al-Khalifa's suitability as a member of FIFA's standing committees, and as a prospective leader of the AFC.

As you may be aware, 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 nearly two-hundred athletes, coaches, referees, and other sports staff, including [six football players](#) from Bahrain's national team. The Government of Bahrain responded to the protests with a brutal crackdown, killing dozens and arresting thousands.

Shortly after the crackdown, Sheikh Nasser bin Hamad Al-Khalifa—one of the king's sons and president of the country's Olympic Committee—was put in charge of a committee formed to arrest, detain, and punish the more than 150 members of the sports community who participated in the protest. Sheikh Nasser's intent on pursuing retribution was unmistakable: in a public statement, he [called for](#) "a wall to fall on [protesters'] heads ... even if they are an athlete." He also [stated](#) that if it were up to him, he would give all of the athletes life in prison.

As a member of the same committee, Sheikh Salman Al-Khalifa, in his capacity as president of the BFA, used photographs to [identify](#) the Bahraini football players who had participated in the

protests. As a result of Sheikh Al-Khalifa's contributions to the government crackdown, Bahrain's football players were subsequently [arrested, detained for several months, abused, tortured, and publicly humiliated](#) by Bahrain's security forces. [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 similarly punished for exercising their free speech rights.

Although FIFA initiated an [investigation](#) in 2011 into the attacks against the players, the investigation was ostensibly dropped after the players were released from prison. Yet, while these players may no longer be behind bars, many of them remain suspended from their club teams and are therefore ineligible to be considered for a spot on the national team. Their careers as professional athletes have been affected as a result, causing some of them to leave their home country for opportunities elsewhere, while suspended players who still live in Bahrain are unable to continue their work as professional athletes. There is no indication that any of the players have been compensated for the abuse they endured while in prison.

FIFA's [Code of Ethics](#) requires officials to uphold the organization's ethical standards. Article 13 obliges officials to "behave in a dignified manner and act with complete credibility and integrity," and "to respect all applicable laws and regulations as well as FIFA's regulatory framework to the extent applicable to them." Article 23 of the code prohibits officials from "offend[ing] the dignity or integrity of a ... private person or group of people through contemptuous, discriminatory or denigratory word or actions on account of ... political opinion or any other opinion ... ." Similarly, article 24 requires officials to "ensure that the personal rights of every individual whom they contact and who is affected by their actions is protected, respected, and safeguarded." The same provision also forbids harassment, defined as "systematic, hostile and repeated acts for a considerable duration, intended to isolate or ostracise a person and affect the dignity of the person."

By aiding in the identification of Bahrain's football players who participated in peaceful protests in 2011, resulting in their arrest, detention, and abuse, Sheikh Salman Al-Khalifa is complicit in the very forms of discrimination, harassment, and abuse prohibited by Articles 23 and 24 of FIFA's Code of Ethics. [His actions also violate Bahrain's constitution, laws, and international conventions](#) to which Bahrain is a party, all of which guarantee the right to free speech and which apply to Sheikh Al-Khalifa, putting him in violation of Article 13 of FIFA's Code of Ethics. We therefore respectfully request that such allegations be referred to FIFA Ethics Committee Chairman Michael Garcia for investigation into potential violations of FIFA's Code of Ethics. If such allegations are found to be supported by evidence, we also request that Sheikh Al-Khalifa's membership on FIFA's standing committees be terminated, and that any additional action deemed appropriate by the Ethics Committee be pursued.

Thank you very much for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Husain Abdulla, Director