

Dear Member of the European Parliament,

We at the European Centre for Democracy & Human Rights (ECDHR) are deeply concerned about the Government of Bahrain's use of the 2023 Grand Prix to whitewash the deteriorating human rights situation in the country. As part of our campaign "[We Race for Freedom](#)", we would like to draw your attention especially to the illegal imprisonment and ill-treatment of Danish-Bahraini human rights activist, Mr. Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja.

Since the violent crackdowns on the peaceful pro-democracy protests in 2011, the Kingdom of Bahrain has increasingly [turned](#) into a police state where activists and civil society actors can no longer freely voice their opinions. It is in the wake of these protests that Mr. Al-Khawaja was [arrested](#) and sentenced to life in prison on [unfounded](#), terrorism-related charges. Throughout his incarceration, Mr. Al-Khawaja [has been](#) subject to torture, beatings, verbal abuse, threats of sexual assault and long periods of solitary confinement. This severe treatment has taken a toll on his health, forcing him to undergo medical surgery multiple times. Because his rights to [proper medical attention](#) and [family visits](#) have been denied, he protested by undergoing six [hunger strikes](#).

As Qatar's World Cup [has already proven](#), hosting such prestigious international competitions like the F1 Grand Prix in countries where human rights are systematically violated is at least highly controversial. The Bahraini government can use this event as a symbol of progress and international prestige, whitewashing its poor human rights record and covering its negative international reputation while continuing to systematically abuse its citizens. This whitewashing strategy related to sports is known as "sportswashing". This is even more relevant now that the FIA restricted how drivers can express themselves through the [amendments](#) made to the International Sporting Code for 2023, threatening to sanction all drivers who do not maintain a neutral stance on personal, political or religious matters.

Recalling the European Parliament's December 2022 resolution for the immediate release of Mr Al-Khawaja, and appreciating [all the other past efforts](#), we ask you to launch a motion for resolution on sportswashing relating to Bahrain's Grand Prix 2023, which would:

- Call on international sports federations and organisations not to be susceptible to authoritarian regimes and to fully ensure the integrity and fairness of sport through absolute transparency and human rights due diligence;
- Call on the FIA to make sure their future contracts will be conditional upon human rights compliance of all the parties involved;

- Call on the FIA to release a statement assessing the potential impact of the 2023 Grand Prix on the human rights situation in Bahrain, and to publicly acknowledge the case of Mr. Al-Khawaja;
- Condemn FIA's new rule as an *ad hoc* application of the principle of neutrality that may violate F1 drivers' freedom of expression and concur to the silencing of human rights violations in Bahrain;
- Call for the Parliament to establish a Subcommittee on Sportswashing, which will ensure that mega-sporting events are organized in countries that strictly comply with EU Human Rights Guidelines;
- Call on the European External Action Service (EEAS) and the VP/HR Josep Borrell to support the EU Delegation to Bahrain in guaranteeing the fundamental right of EU citizens to consular protection for Mr. Al-Khawaja, and in coordinating action with Member States' representations in Bahrain for assisting him on the same conditions as their own nationals, in line with the [Council Directive 2015/637](#), which specifies such obligations in case of "Relief and repatriation in case of an emergency", "Being a victim of crime" and "Arrest or detention".
- Call on the EEAS and the VP/HR to coordinate with the Danish government, the EU Delegation to Bahrain, Member States' representations in the country for pressuring the Bahraini government to guarantee the physical and psychological integrity and security of Abulhadi al-Khawaja, including through EU visits to Jau Prison, full access to his family and lawyers.

For all further enquiries, please be sure to reach out to us via the channels listed at the bottom of this letter.

Sincerely,

European Centre for Democracy & Human Rights (ECDHR) Staff.