

07/03/2023

Dear Ambassadors,

We at the European Centre for Democracy and Human Rights (ECDHR) are writing to you concerning the case of Danish-Bahraini citizen, Abdulhadi al-Khawaja, imprisoned in Bahrain since 2011. Mr. Al-Khawaja is a prominent, [award winning](#) human rights defender, founder and leader of the Gulf Centre for Human Rights (GCHR), and the Bahrain Centre for Human rights (BCHR), who fought for over 20 years for the promotion of human rights and civil liberties not only in Bahrain but in the whole Arabic Gulf. Concerned that the Government of Bahrain will exploit the approaching Formula 1 Grand Prix to whitewash the deteriorating human rights situation in the country, we have launched our campaign, ‘We Race for Freedom,’ to pressure Bahraini authorities to immediately and unconditionally release Mr. Al-Khawaja.

Since the violent crackdown 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 [arbitrarily arrested](#) by the Bahraini authorities and [sentenced](#) to life in prison on terrorism-related charges that [were proven to be unfounded](#) by the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry (BICI).

Despite the huge international outcry for his release, [human rights organizations](#), [MEPs](#), [various other European officials](#), [UN Special Mandate Holders](#) demanding his release over the last 12 years, Mr. Al-Khawaja [remains imprisoned](#) at Jau Prison. Throughout his incarceration, he has been subjected to various forms of abuse. These include [torture](#), beatings, verbal abuse, threats of sexual assault, and long periods of solitary confinement. He has protested against his unjust imprisonment and other forms of reprisals by conducting six [hunger strikes](#), which have taken a serious toll on his health. Mr. Al-Khawaja is currently being [denied](#) adequate medical attention, which causes him to [suffer](#) from severe medical complications caused by the mistreatment suffered in jail. Mr. Al-Khawaja is also [banned](#) from receiving in-person visits from his family.

In light of all of this, the European Parliament (EP) [adopted](#) a resolution on the situation of Mr. Al-Khawaja in December 2022, condemning his enduring detention and demanding his unconditional and immediate release. This was only the most recent among the numerous European Parliament resolutions on Bahrain that were passed since 2011 ([15](#)). Despite almost all of them included a call for the release of Mr. Al-Khawaja, his condition has not seen any improvements.

We want to stress the fact that Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja is a Danish citizen who has been wrongfully detained and seriously abused for 12 years. As an unrepresented, detained EU citizen in a third country (Bahrain does not host a Danish embassy or consulate), he is entitled to consular protection by other EU Member States’ embassies or consulates in Bahrain, as established in [Council Directive \(EU\) 2015/637](#). In particular, Member States are required to provide the Foreign Ministry representing the concerned individual with all necessary information, and they are authorized to “conclude practical arrangements on sharing responsibilities for providing consular protection to unrepresented citizens” in cooperation with EU delegations.



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In light of the above, we consider that your engagement in our demarche is extremely important and in line with the commitments assigned to EU member states' embassies under Council Directive (EU) 2015/637, as well as the aforementioned parliamentary resolution concerning Mr. Al-Khawaja's case. We therefore urge you to:

- Call on the Bahraini Government, to immediately and unconditionally release Abdulhadi al-Khawaja;
- Take all necessary measures to guarantee the physical and psychological integrity and security of Abulhadi al-Khawaja, by requesting the Bahraini government to ensure that while he is in custody in Jau Prison he is provided proper care to maintain his health, and he is allowed full access to his family and lawyers;
- Comply with your commitments established by Council Directive (EU) 2015/637, in particular by sharing information with the Danish Foreign Ministry and coordinating with other Member States' embassies and the EU Delegation to provide consular protection to Mr. Al-Khawaja in all possible ways;
- Public transparent information about how many attempts have been made to visit Mr. Al-Khawaja in prison since his arrest and the outcome of those visits;
- Call on the Bahraini authorities to allow UN Special Mandate Holders, the EU Special Representative for Human Rights and other independent observers to visit him in prison, and make information of these visits available in case these will take place.

We thank you very much for your consideration and we look forward to hearing back from you.

Sincerely,

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