

The Danish Institute for Human Rights
Wilders Plads 8K
1403 Copenhagen K, Denmark

13/03/2023

Dear Madam/sir,

We from the European Centre for Democracy and Human Rights (ECDHR) are reaching out to highlight the case of detained Danish-Bahraini human rights defender, Abdulhadi al-Khawaja. We would like to draw your attention especially to the controversial implications of the Danish company *DSV A/S: Global Transport and Logistics* sponsoring the Bahrain International Circuit, which hosts the Formula 1 (F1) Grand Prix in a country that has illegally detained and abused Mr. Al-khawaja, a Danish citizen, for the past 12 years.

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 arbitrarily [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. He protested the denial of [proper medical](#) care and [restrictions on family visits](#) by undertaking [six hunger strikes](#), which took an additional toll on his health.

As Qatar's FIFA World Cup [has already proven](#), hosting 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. By sponsoring Bahrain's 2023 Grand Prix, DSV A/S is indirectly facilitating the Bahraini government in covering the abuses faced by Danish citizen Mr. Al-Khawaja and the country's documented violations of human rights.

This not only contrasts with DSV's own commitments to adhere to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, as expressed in their [Code of Conduct](#). It also acts in disregard of [The Danish Action Plan on the implementation of the UN Guiding Principles of Human Rights](#), which establishes the State duty to protect human rights and sets out expectations to all businesses within Denmark's territory and/or jurisdiction to "take responsibility to respect human rights when operating abroad - especially in developing countries where there can be an increased risk of having an adverse impact on human rights."

This is our motivation for starting our campaign "We Race For Freedom", aimed at pressuring the Bahraini government to release Mr. Al-Khawaja. Danish parliamentarians and members of the European Parliament have already been contacted as part of this effort, not only in relation to the sponsorship of the Bahrain Grand Prix, but also to the consular protection Mr. Al-Khawaja is entitled to as a European citizen under [Council Directive \(EU\) 2015/637](#).

We commend the Institute's [assessment](#) of the degree of compliance of Danish businesses, including DSV/AS, with their human rights obligations. However, apart from evaluating the company's direct impact on human rights, namely with regards to the treatment of employees, we believe a case can be made on DSV/AS's controversial involvement in sponsoring a major event in a country that systematically commits human rights violations and, most importantly, that has been arbitrarily detaining and seriously abusing Abdulhadi al-Khawaja, a Danish citizen.

In light of the above, we consider that your engagement in our demarche is extremely important. Thus, we kindly ask you to:

- Call on the Danish Prime Minister, Ms. Mette Frederiksen, and the Danish Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Lars Løkke Rasmussen, to explicitly demand the immediate and unconditional release of Abdulhadi al-Khawaja on the occasion of the next meetings scheduled with Bahraini officials;
- Call on the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs to coordinate with the EU Delegation and Member States' representations in Bahrain to provide Mr Al-Khawaja with the consular protection he is entitled to under Council Directive (EU) 2015/637, namely by requesting to visit him in prison and ensure he is provided with proper care to maintain his health, and he is allowed full access to his family and lawyers;
- Point out in future assessments of *DSV A/S: Global Transport and Logistics*' human rights due diligence that the Bahrain International Circuit, in which the company operates as a major sponsor, is located in a country that systematically commits human rights violations and, most importantly, that has been arbitrarily detaining and seriously abusing Abdulhadi al-Khawaja, a Danish citizen;
- Call on *DSV A/S: Global Transport and Logistics* to comply with the human rights commitments contained in its Code of Conduct and in the Danish National Plan, especially with respect to its business relations involving countries implicated in serious human rights violations;
- Call on *DSV A/S: Global Transport and Logistics* to conditionalize its future business relationships with Bahrain upon the immediate and unconditional release of Abdulhadi al-Khawaja;

We thank you for your consideration and remain available to provide you with any further information you may need.

Sincerely,

European Centre for Democracy & Human Rights (ECDHR) Staff