

Dear Kevin Magnussen,

We at the European Centre for Democracy and Human Rights (ECDHR) are writing to you as part of our campaign '[We Race for Freedom](#)' to appeal for your assistance in securing the release of Danish-Bahraini citizen, Abdulhadi al-Khawaja, [imprisoned](#) in Bahrain since 2011. He is a prominent, [award winning](#) human rights advocate, who fought for over 20 years for the promotion of human rights and civil liberties in Bahrain and was outspoken against human rights violations and corruption in the whole Arabic Gulf. On the eve of the Bahrain Grand Prix, we are concerned that his case and the other ongoing injustices in the country will be sportswashed due to FIA's political disengagement. We therefore ask you, as a Danish national and F1 driver, to use your notoriety and outreach capacity to support us in raising awareness about Mr. Al-Khawaja's situation.

Following his participation in the 2011 peaceful pro-democracy demonstrations in Bahrain, in April 2011, security forces dressed in civilian clothing [arbitrarily arrested](#) Al-Khawaja. In June 2011, he was [sentenced](#) to life imprisonment by a Bahraini military court, the National Safety Court, following an unjust trial that did not align with international standards. He was charged with terrorism solely for exercising his right to freedom of opinion and expression, assembly, and association, all granted by the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The only evidence the conviction was based on was a confession [extracted](#) under torture.

Since his arrest, Mr. Al-Khawaja has been subject to various forms of [abuse](#), including [torture](#), beatings, verbal abuse, threats of sexual assault and long periods of solitary confinement. Mr. Al-Khawaja has protested dreadful prison conditions and other forms of reprisals by conducting six [hunger strikes](#). He is being denied adequate medical attention and [suffers](#) from severe complications as a result of torture and his overall mistreatment in detention.

In addition, Mr. Al-Khawaja continues to be judicially [harassed](#) by Bahraini authorities. He was convicted last November in absentia on two additional charges, one for breaking a chair and the other for insulting a prison guard. The Bahraini court of appeal, again without his presence, has recently [ruled](#) that he does not have the right to appeal these two convictions.

In light of Mr. Al-Khawaja's enduring unlawful detention, the European Parliament (EP) [adopted](#) a resolution in December 2022, which condemned his enduring detention and demanded 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](#)). Almost all of them included a call for the release of Mr. Al-Khawaja. In spite of this, his condition has not seen any improvements.

While we realize that changing the human rights situation in Bahrain is not your or any drivers' responsibility, we encourage you to keep spreading messages of solidarity with those who are suffering at the hands of the Bahraini authorities and support the organizations that are fighting relentlessly to help them.

This is of utmost importance now that the FIA restricted drivers freedom of expression through the [amendments](#) made to FIA's International Sporting Code for 2023, threatening to sanction all pilots who do not maintain a neutral stance on personal, political or religious matters.

Although the FIA attempted to [justify](#) the ban by citing the organization's duty to uphold the principle of neutrality enshrined in the International Olympic Committee's Code of Ethics, the revised provisions are anything but neutral and contrast with the political stance the FIA [took](#) against Russia's invasion of

Ukraine. Sports have always been used by athletes to take a stance on current affairs or to act as allies for others, manifestations which often took the form of protests against human rights violations and expressions of solidarity and that, in some cases, have prompted reactions from authorities. Rather than supporting its athletes' fight against the global inequalities it [claims](#) itself to stand against, the FIA made these revisions to prevent pre- and post-race events from being used as such platforms in the future. The revisions, coupled with the lengthy [contract](#) signed between F1 and Bahrain that guarantees races will be held in the country until 2036, are proof that the governing body wants to oblige drivers to comply with its own political agenda, and underline the organization's hypocrisy.

Reality is, FIA's principle of neutrality itself is nothing but neutral. The organization of international events like the Grand Prix in countries with menacing human rights records is by itself an indirect avenue for those very countries to hide their political atrocities. This political disengagement is not the impartial stance FIA would like it to be, and if the organization continues to consider its events as playful parentheses completely detached by the socio-political contexts in which they are held, it will continue turning a blind eye to human rights violations in the world under the disillusion of neutral disinvolvement.

It is thus crucial that, in moments like the Bahrain Grand Prix, when the country is placed under the spotlight, influential personalities like yourself speak up to prevent the Bahraini government from sportswashing and exploiting these major sports events to rehabilitate its image in front of the world, when in fact, it continues carrying out atrocities against its citizens. We appeal to you personally to raise Abdulhadi al-Khawaja's case before the Danish government, calling for it to follow the EP's firm position on his situation, coordinate its efforts with the EU and use it as a leverage to pressure the Bahraini regime as a united force, rather than an isolated state. The firm stances and public pressure you can exert as a Danish conational and prominent F1 pilot will definitely increase Abdulhadi al-Khawaja's chances to return to Denmark, be reunited with his family and receive proper medical care for the complications caused by the torture he endured in prison.

We thank you very much for your consideration.

Sincerely,

ECDHR Staff.