

URGENT ACTION

PRISONER OF CONSCIENCE DENIED HEALTH CARE

Danish-Bahraini human rights defender Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja has not been seen by a cardiologist since he experienced cardiac arrhythmia in jail on 28 February 2023. A doctor who examined him at the Bahrain Defence Force hospital had stated that he should be urgently referred to a cardiologist. Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja is a prisoner of conscience who should be immediately and unconditionally released.

TAKE ACTION: WRITE AN APPEAL IN YOUR OWN WORDS OR USE THIS MODEL LETTER

Crown Prince and Prime Minister

Sheikh Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa

Court of the Crown Prince

P.O Box 29091

Riffa – Bahrain

Email (via contact form): <http://www.crownprince.bh/en/contact>

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Your Highness,

Human rights defender **Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja**, who is serving a life sentence in Jaw prison, has been arbitrarily imprisoned for 12 years solely for exercising his rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and expression during the 2011 popular uprising in Bahrain. He has been waiting to see a cardiologist since a doctor at the Bahrain Defence Force (BDF) hospital recommended that on 28 February 2023, when Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja experienced cardiac arrhythmia.

When Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja was receiving treatment at BDF hospital on 28 February 2023, a plain clothed man introducing himself as the head of security of the hospital ordered that he be handcuffed, something Abdulhadi refused. He was returned to prison and was not assessed by a cardiologist. Authorities later [announced](#) that a medical appointment at a cardiology department had been set for Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja for 19 March 2023. The prison administration told him that the appointment was postponed until an unknown date.

According to Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja's daughter, Maryam, on 26 March 2023 at dawn, the prison authority told him that he had an appointment with a cardiologist and a urologist. He waited for the transfer, having agreed to be taken in handcuffs on board an armoured bus. According to prisoners' testimonies, during such travel, prisoners are, at times, kept in the vehicle for hours. After a back and forth between the prison authorities and the hospital, it became too late in the day to take him to the appointments, Abdulhadi told his daughter. On 6 April 2023, the [Bahrain News Agency](#) published a statement by the Administration of Government Hospitals stating that Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja "had recently received the necessary medical care, which showed that he did not suffer from any heart or chest problems". The statement added that he had "had two medical appointments on 26 March 2023... but that he refused to be transferred to the hospital using the bus designated for transporting" prisoners, an account Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja contested. Further hospital appointments, including on [9 April](#), 4 and 11 May 2023 did not take place.

We call upon your Highness to release Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja immediately and unconditionally as he is a prisoner of conscience imprisoned solely for the peaceful exercise of his human rights. In the meantime, and due to his serious health issues, we urge you to ensure he has timely access to adequate health care, consistent with international human rights standards.

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Prominent human rights defender and prisoner of conscience Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja, aged 61, co-founded both the Gulf Centre for Human Rights (GCHR) and the Bahrain Center for Human Rights (BCHR). Until early 2011, he worked as MENA Protection Coordinator for the human rights group Frontline Defenders. He also previously took part in an Amnesty International fact-finding visit to Iraq in 2003 and is a member of the International Advisory Network of the Business and Human Rights Resource Centre. He is a peaceful advocate of human rights and the recipient of several human rights awards, including the Dignity - World without Torture Award which he received in October 2013. Most recently, in 2022, he obtained the prestigious Martin Ennals Award for Human Rights Defenders. Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja is serving a life sentence in Jaw prison for his role in leading peaceful protests during the 2011 popular uprising in Bahrain. He was convicted and sentenced following a military trial in 2011 and later at a retrial in 2012 by a civilian court on charges including "setting up terror groups to topple the royal regime and change the constitution".

On 4 May 2023, the United Nations published a [joint communication](#) sent earlier in the year by the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders and five other UN experts to the government of Bahrain, expressing their utmost concern over Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja's case, including his arbitrary detention and renewed allegations of torture, and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment and punishment. On 17 April 2023, the Bahrain government [responded](#) to the letter not recognizing Abdulhadi al-Khawaja as a human rights defender, rather labelling him as a "terrorist". It also said that he was enjoying his rights, including healthcare and legal representation.

On 9 May 2023, Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja began a daily protest in front of the CCTV cameras in the prison yard in order for him and his fellow prisoners to access the necessary medical appointments. He would hold up written signs that read: "Preventing medical treatment is slow, systematic murder" and "You commit torture and prevent medical treatment". On 14 May 2023, he told his family that he was temporarily suspending his protest as the prison administration had promised to improve conditions and allow him access to adequate treatment, but he is yet to see the specialists who were meant to examine him.

On 6 November 2022, during a call with his daughters who live abroad, Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja said that he was facing a number of new trials. He told them that the first trial began on 3 November 2022 in his absence before the Second Lower Criminal Court for allegedly breaking a plastic chair and insulting a police officer in Jaw prison in November 2021 after being denied phone calls with his daughters. His second trial began on 21 November 2022, on charges of "insulting a public servant". The case relates to an incident on 30 March 2022, when Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja protested against the normalization deal with Israel (Abraham Accords) and told a prison officer "You are a dirty and unclean person. You have a way of treating people like animals".

On 28 November 2022, the court convicted and fined Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja in both cases. The two cases were taken before the Second High Criminal Court of Appeal. On 29 December 2022, the court ruled that Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja did not have the right to appeal his conviction and 100 Bahraini dinars (equivalent to 265 US dollars) fine in relation to the second case for insulting a public servant. On 5 January 2023, the court upheld his conviction and the fine of 60 Bahraini dinars (equivalent to 160 US dollars) in the first case for breaking a chair and insulting a public servant.

Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja was not allowed to attend any of the courts' proceedings.

On 15 December 2022, the European Parliament adopted an urgent resolution highlighting Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja's case and those of other political prisoners and calling for his release.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: English, Arabic
You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 22 July 2023
Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

NAME AND PRONOUN: Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja (he/him)

LINK TO PREVIOUS UA: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/MDE11/6552/2023/en/>

ADDITIONAL TARGETS

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