

His Majesty King Shaikh Hamad bin 'Issa Al Khalifa

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BAR HUMAN RIGHTS
COMMITTEE OF
ENGLAND AND WALES

17 April, 2012

Your Majesty,

I am writing on behalf of the Bar Human Rights Committee of England and Wales (BHRC). The BHRC is the international human rights arm of the Bar of England and Wales. It is an independent body primarily concerned with the protection of the rights of advocates and judges around the world. The Committee is also concerned with defending the rule of law and internationally recognized legal standards relating to human rights and the right to a fair trial.

The BHRC wishes to communicate its deep concern regarding the situation of Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja, founder of the Gulf Centre for Human Rights and former president of the Bahrain Centre for Human Rights. As we understand it Mr Al-Khawaja is on the 70th day of a hunger strike to protest his alleged ongoing imprisonment for peaceful opposition activities and the conditions of his arrest and detention.

As documented by the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry (BICI) Mr Al-Khawaja was arrested on 8 April 2011 for his role in demonstrations in Bahrain in February and March. Mr Al-Khawaja was one of 59 individuals who alleged serious mistreatment by security forces who were subsequently examined by independent forensic medical personnel commissioned by the BICI. The Commission's report documents allegations as to how his jaw was broken immediately after his arrest and the fact that whilst in hospital undergoing major surgery to mend his jaw he was blindfolded and handcuffed to the bed. It was further alleged that after release from hospital, Mr Al-Khawaja was held in solitary confinement in a small cell and experienced regular beatings, sexual assault and other ill treatment amounting in some instances to torture.

Mr Al-Khawaja was tried as part of a group trial of 21 activists before a National Safety Court, a form of military tribunal, and in June 2011 he was sentenced to life in prison for allegedly conspiring to overthrow the Bahraini government. An appeal, also heard in a military tribunal, was dismissed.

The BICI and other international human rights organizations have found that trials held in the National Safety Courts, including that of Mr Al-Khawaja, did not comply with international fair trial standards or even Bahrain's own criminal code. The BICI recommended the transfer of all such cases to civilian courts to review the convictions and sentences yet this has not yet happened in the case of Mr Al-Khawaja and other