

PRESS RELEASE - THE OBSERVATORY

BAHRAIN: Ongoing arbitrary arrests and judicial harassment of human rights defenders

Paris-Geneva, August 9, 2012 – As new cases of arbitrary arrests and ongoing judicial harassment have been reported in Bahrain, the Observatory remains extremely concerned with the very repressive climate faced by human rights defenders in the country.

On August 2, 2012, Ms. **Zainab Al-Khawaja** was once again arrested while she was protesting alone at Al Qadam roundabout against the arbitrary detention of her father Mr. **Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja**, founder of the Gulf Centre for Human Rights (GCHR), former President of the Bahrain Centre for Human Rights (BCHR), and former MENA Director at Front Line. While arresting Ms. Al-Khawaja, police officers verbally assaulted her and threatened her with reprisals as she was legitimately resisting their orders to give a blood sample. She was finally forcibly led to the Fort Prison Hospital before being transferred to Isa Town Detention Center, where she was kept handcuffed despite a serious leg injury sustained after security forces shot her with tear gas canisters at close range. On August 4, 2012, the Public Prosecution remanded her into custody for seven days.

The Observatory further recalls that Mr. **Nabeel Rajab**, President of the BCHR, Director of the GCHR and FIDH Deputy Secretary General, has faced constant judicial harassment, as four cases have been brought against him since May 2012 in relation with his human rights activities. Mr. Rajab is still facing three of these cases. In particular, he has been detained since July 9, 2012 and sentenced to 3 months' imprisonment for alleged libel after he tweeted the following on June 2: "*Khalifa, leave the residents of Al Muharraq, its Sheikhs and its elderly. Everyone knows that you are not popular here, and if it wasn't for the subsidies, they wouldn't have gone out to welcome you. When will you step down?*"

After his arrest and sentencing, his lawyers immediately filed two appeals. One of them requests the suspension of the sentence on the grounds that the investigation did not provide any solid legal basis to convict Mr. Rajab. After several postponements, this appeal was scheduled to be considered by the Higher Appeal Court on August 5, 2012. However, on that day, the judge decided again to postpone the hearing to August 12, officially in order to call the police officer who was in charge of the investigation procedure to the stand.

The Observatory is deeply concerned about this new postponement, as its only aim seems to be to keep Mr. Nabeel Rajab in detention as long as possible, by delaying the examination of the request filed by his lawyers against his 3-month imprisonment sentence. The Observatory reiterates its call on the Bahraini authorities to immediately and unconditionally release him as his detention is arbitrary and only aims at sanctioning his human rights activities.

The Observatory firmly denounces these new developments against human rights activities in Bahrain, and recalls the authorities' obligation to comply with the international human rights instruments ratified by the Kingdom of Bahrain, and with the 1998 Declaration on Human Rights Defenders and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

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