



## Bahrain

11 April 2011

### Bahrain: Grave concern for human rights defenders

**The Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, a joint programme of the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) and the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT), expresses its deep concern following the recent intensification of the criminalisation of human rights defenders in Bahrain. Indeed, during the weekend, Mr. Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja, former MENA Director at Front Line and former President of the Bahrain Centre for Human Rights (BCHR), was arrested and beaten at his house, and Mr. Nabeel Rajab, BCHR President and Deputy Secretary General of FIDH, was informed that a criminal investigation had been opened against him.**

On April 9, 2011, Mr. Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja, who has been organising peaceful awareness-raising and human rights education activities for protesters in the recent weeks, was arrested at his daughter's house, along with two of his sons-in-law, Messrs. Wafi Almajid and Hussein Ahmed, by masked policemen who forced entry to the building. The three men, and Mr. Al-Khawaja in particular, were severely beaten up before being taken to an unknown destination. Moreover, Mr. Mohammad Al-Maskati, another Mr. Al-Khawaja's son-in-law as well as President of the Bahrain Youth Society for Human Rights (BYHRS), who has been monitoring human rights violations committed since the protest movement began, and who was also present in the house, was severely beaten during the raid but not arrested.

On April 10, the Bahraini authorities wrote on twitter: "Al-Khawaja was arrested for charges to be brought against him legally. He violently resisted the arrest and had to be subdued" ; the tweet then continues as "(Al-Khawaja) is not a reformer (...) He called for the overthrow of the legitimate regime". To date, no information has been given to the family of Messrs. Al-Khawaja, Almajid and Ahmed neither on their whereabouts nor regarding any charges pending against them.

The Observatory denounces this attempt by the authorities to assimilate human rights defenders to political opponents. More than 48 hours after the arrest, the Observatory is deeply concerned at the condition of Mr. Al-Khawaja, who needs to take daily medication, and his two sons-in-law and fears for their physical and psychological integrity.

Furthermore, on April 10, 2011, the Ministry of Interior announced through its website that Mr. Nabeel Rajab was to be referred to the Military Prosecutor for allegedly fabricating and publishing a photograph of a protester who died in custody. Mr. Nabeel Rajab had published on his Facebook page images of a man identified as Ali Isa Saqer, who had died in custody on April 9. Mr. Saqer was being held on charges of attempted murder of policemen while allegedly trying to run them over with his car on March 13. The photographs show a man with multiple marks of torture across his body and face. On March 28, the Military General Prosecutor had issued Decision No. 5 of 2011 imposing a ban on any publication dealing with ongoing investigations conducted by the Military Prosecutor, under

the State of National Safety.

The Observatory expresses its deepest concern about the above-mentioned acts of harassment against Messrs. Al-Khawaja and Rajab, which seem to merely aim at sanctioning their human rights activities, as well as about the ongoing attempts to hinder the right of the human rights defenders to document and denounce human rights violations. Accordingly, the Observatory calls upon the Bahraini authorities to guarantee in all circumstances the physical and psychological integrity of all human rights defenders in Bahrain; to take prompt action in order to disclose the whereabouts of Messrs. Al-Khawaja, Almajid and Ahmed and release them immediately as their arrest is arbitrary; to put an end to all acts of harassment - including at the judicial level - against human rights defenders as well as to conform in any circumstances with the provisions of the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Defenders and more generally of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights and other international human rights instruments ratified by Bahrain.

<http://www.fidh.org/Bahrain-Grave-concern-for-human-rights-defenders,9498>