



**Middle
East
Studies
Association**
of North America, Inc.

1957 E Street NW, Suite 401
Washington, DC 20052

Phone 520-333-2577

Fax 520-207-3166

caf@mesana.org

mesana.org



17 August 2023

His Majesty Sheikh Hamad bin 'Issa Al Khalifa
Office of His Majesty the King
P.O. Box 555
Rifa'a Palace, al-Manama, Bahrain
Fax: +973 1766 4587

Your Majesty,

We write to you on behalf of the Committee on Academic Freedom of the Middle East Studies Association of North America (MESA) to express our deep dismay regarding the denial of urgent medical care to Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja, a Bahraini-Danish citizen whom the government of Bahrain has imprisoned for a decade for his participation in peaceful political protests in 2011. Al-Khawaja and hundreds of other prisoners have this month (August 2023) initiated hunger strikes to protest deplorable conditions, which include [reports of](#) arbitrary isolation, interference with family visits, and inadequate health care. We urge you to act immediately to release prisoner of conscience Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja and provide him the necessary healthcare in line with international human rights norms.

MESA was founded in 1966 to support scholarship and teaching on the Middle East and North Africa. The preeminent organization in the field, the Association publishes the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* and has nearly 2800 members worldwide. MESA is committed to ensuring academic freedom and freedom of expression, both within the region and in connection with the study of the region in North America and elsewhere.

Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja (age 61), a notable human rights advocate with both Danish and Bahraini citizenship, and recognized as a prisoner of conscience, initiated a hunger strike on 9 August 2023 [along with other prisoners](#) held at Bahrain's Jaw prison. He has been arbitrarily detained in Bahrain since 2011, following his role in leading nonviolent demonstrations demanding democratic change and fundamental human rights and freedoms. During his incarceration, Mr. Al-Khawaja has [been subjected](#) to torture and sexual assault. He has repeatedly been refused appropriate medical care, including the opportunity to consult with a cardiologist, even though he is at constant risk of experiencing a heart attack or stroke. On 7 August 2023, his scheduled heart appointment was cancelled by the prison authorities who insisted on transporting him in handcuffs in an armored vehicle, contrary to a medical recommendation. On 9 August, Al-Khawaja was denied access to an ophthalmologist for his deteriorating glaucoma, which requires continuous monitoring and specialist care. The repeated and deliberate withholding of medical treatment, along with the disregard for Mr. Al-

Khawaja's multiple health issues, clearly violates the Mandela Rules (Rule 27).

Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja is a [well-known](#) champion of human rights and a prisoner of conscience. Al-Khawaja played a pivotal role in establishing both the Gulf Centre for Human Rights (GCHR) and the Bahrain Center for Human Rights (BCHR). Prior to 2011, he held the position of MENA Protection Coordinator at the human rights organization Frontline Defenders. He also participated in an investigative mission to Iraq in 2003 organized by Amnesty International. Additionally, he serves as a member of the International Advisory Network of the Business and Human Rights Resource Centre. Recognized as a peaceful advocate for human rights, Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja has received numerous awards in recognition of his efforts, including the Dignity - World without Torture Award, bestowed upon him in October 2013. In 2022, he was honoured with the prestigious Martin Ennals Award for Human Rights Defenders.

The reports regarding Mr Al-Khawaja's welfare are entirely consistent with [ongoing reports](#) and documentation of the denial of appropriate medical care to prisoners in Bahrain. In 2018, Amnesty International [detailed](#) 'frequent, ongoing, and in some cases wilful medical negligence in Bahrain's penitentiary system'. In 2019, Human Rights Watch [reported that](#) prisons were 'arbitrarily denying the prisoners urgent medical care, refusing to refer them to specialists, failing to disclose medical examination results, and withholding medication as a form of punishment'. Such ongoing denials of appropriate medical care have also been documented [as recently](#) as 2022 by the US State Department. On 16 May 2023 several human rights organizations - including Amnesty International and the Danish Institute Against Torture (DIGNITY) - [called on](#) the Bahrain Government to ensure Al-Khawaja adequate medical treatment. Our committee has also written numerous letters [since 2013](#) about similar medical maltreatment of another Bahraini prisoner of conscience, Professor Abduljalil Al-Singace.

Your Majesty, we urge you to promptly and unconditionally release Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja, who is being held as a prisoner of conscience solely for peacefully exercising his human rights. Given his grave health concerns, we implore you to guarantee his prompt and appropriate access to healthcare in accordance with international human rights standards. We also call upon you to free all those individuals who have been imprisoned solely for voicing dissenting opinions, and to guarantee that Bahrain follows worldwide norms regarding the freedom to express opinions and the right to assemble peacefully.



Re: Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja

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Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Eve M. Troutt Powell'.

Eve Troutt Powell

MESA President

Professor, University of Pennsylvania

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Laurie Brand'.

Laurie Brand

Chair, Committee on Academic Freedom

Professor Emerita, University of Southern California

cc:

Her Excellency Liselotte Plesner,
Ambassador-Designate of Denmark to Bahrain
Embassy of Denmark
Main Road One
Diplomatic Quarter
PO Box 94398
Riyadh 12512
Phone +966 (11) 488 0101
Fax +966 11 488 1366
E-mail: ruhamb@um.dk

The Minister for Foreign Affairs. Lars Løkke Rasmussen,
Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark
Asiatisk Plads 2
DK-1448 Copenhagen K
Phone. +45 33 92 00 00
Fax +45 32 54 05 33
Email: um@um.dk