

26 Organizations Condemn the Imprisonment of Woman Human Rights Defender Zainab AlKhawaja and her 16 Month Old Baby

The undersigned organizations strongly condemn the escalating targeting of human rights defenders (HRDs) and women human rights defenders (WHRDs) in Bahrain, including the arrest and detention of prominent WHRD Zainab AlKhawaja, along with her 16 month old baby on 14 March 2016 by security forces to serve several sentences related to a number of charges including tearing up a picture of the monarch, which is considered a crime in Bahrain, and for insulting a public official.¹

During the first 9 hours of her arrest, WHRD AlKhawaja was denied of food for her 16 month old baby. She was placed in prison cell 19, where there is an outbreak of Hepatitis C amongst the prisoners, and the prison authority refused to allow baby food or soft toys in for the baby. The blankets she was given were stained and dirty. When she first arrived, Alkhawaja was forced to carry all the bags and the baby as the prison guards refused to assist her, causing her back muscles to spasm. Due to this, Alkhawaja had to be taken to the hospital two days in a row, given an injection for the pain and a backbrace. This is not the first time that WHRD AlKhawaja has been imprisoned², which shows a lucid systematic

¹ Bahrain: #FreeZainabAndBaby, Demand the immediate and unconditional release of Zainab Al-Khawaja and her 15-month-old son. Gulf Center for Human Rights, 1 April 2016

² In [a letter from prison](#) shortly after her arrest, Ms. Al-Khawaja wrote: "As I walked up to the prison door carrying my baby, I realized that I had walked through that door on crutches, I had walked through that door pregnant, and I had been carried through that door by police. Five years have passed since the start of the revolution in Bahrain; five years of systematic aggression on the people of this country whose only wish was to seek equal rights and democracy."

She continued, "It's hard to look pain in the eyes and acknowledge it, but that's exactly what I ask everyone to do. Yes there are governments willing to turn a blind eye to our suffering and shake hands with those who oppress us, but I also believe that there are enough good people in the world who recognize the good fight, who admire a people who sacrifice in the hope for a better future, and who can't stand by silently in the face of oppression."

targeting of her due to her active role in the promotion of human rights in Bahrain.

The undersigned organizations also express their anger at the fact that WHRD AlKhawaja was arrested on the day on which the 60th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) commenced, with a primary theme of linking women's empowerment to the sustainable development goals, and a review theme of the agreed conclusions of the 57th session, that focused on violence against women and girls. While the Bahraini Delegation participated in the 60th session to allege an impressive record in promoting and advancing women's rights, WHRD AlKhawaja was arrested and denied appropriate treatment.

In sequence, we strongly urge and call on the Bahraini government to immediately drop the sentences against prominent WHRD Zainab AlKhawaja, and release both her and her 16 month old baby. We also call on the international community to call on the contradictory actions of the Bahraini government, who engage in international fora to showcase their impressive record in women's rights, while they target pivotal WHRDs such as Zainab AlKhawaja. We also urge the Bahraini government to stop the targeting of HRDs and WHRDs who have an influential role in the Bahraini struggle for democracy and human rights, and recognize them instead as real partners and true agents of change.

The Undersigned Organizations:

1. Nazra for Feminist Studies.
2. Association for Progressive Communications.
3. Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID).
4. Center for Egyptian Women's Legal Assistance (CEWLA).
5. Center for Women's Global Leadership (CWGL).
6. CIVICUS World Alliance.

7. ENadeem Center for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Victims of Violence and Torture.
8. FIDH, within the framework of the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders.
9. Freedom (Horeya) for Support of Democracy and Human Rights.
10. Global Fund for Women (GFW).
11. Groupe re Recherche sur les Femmes et les Lois au Senegal (GREFELS).
12. Gulf Center for Human Rights (GCHR).
13. International Civil Society Action Network (ICAN).
14. International Service for Human Rights (ISHR).
15. Isis-Women's International Cross Cultural Exchange (Isis-WICCE).
16. JASS (Just Associates).
17. MADRE.
18. Palestinian Women Committees Coalition.
19. Secularism is a Women's Issue (SIAWI).
20. The African Feminist Forum.
21. Urgent Action Fund (UAF) - Latin America.
22. Urgent Action Fund for Women's Human Rights.
23. Women Human Rights Defenders Regional Coalition for the Middle East and North Africa (WHRD MENA Coalition).
24. Women Living under Muslim Laws (WLUML).

25. Women's Global Network for Reproductive Rights (WGNRR).
26. World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT), within the framework of the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders.