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**Bahrain: Human rights defender Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja at imminent danger of losing his life**

On 15 August 2023, human rights defender **Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja** was denied a prearranged video call with his daughter days after he was rushed to the intensive care unit where doctors declared his life was in danger. Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja is at imminent danger of losing his life since he has started a water-only hunger strike on 9 August 2023 in protest of his continued imprisonment and denial of access to adequate medical treatment.

[Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja](#) is a Danish-Bahraini prominent human rights defender and former Front Line Defenders Protection Coordinator for the Middle East and North Africa. He is also the co-founder of Gulf Center for Human Rights (GCHR) and a former President of the Bahrain Centre for Human Rights (BCHR). In 2011, he was detained, tortured, including torture at the later mentioned military Bahrain Defence Force (BDF) Hospital, and subjected to an unfair trial on fabricated charges that led to him being sentenced to life in prison because of his human rights activities. In 2022, he was awarded the [Martin Ennals Award](#) for individuals and organisations that have shown exceptional commitment to defending and promoting human rights, despite the risks involved.

On Tuesday, 15 August 2023, human rights defender Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja was denied a scheduled video call with his daughter, and his access to video calls has been suspended for the rest of the week.

On Monday, 14 August 2023, Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja was reportedly very weak, unable to sit up and unable to raise his arms above his head.

On Friday, 11 August 2023, Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja was rushed to the intensive care unit of the BDF Hospital due to urgent heart problems. His family states that the attending doctor declared that Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja's life was in danger. Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja was given an intravenous injection, which stabilized his heart rhythm after two hours. He was then returned to his cell without further information about his health condition.

On Wednesday, 9 August 2023, human rights defender Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja began a water-only hunger strike in protest of his continued imprisonment and after facing serious and consistent denial of access to adequate medical treatment.

Earlier this year, on 28 February 2023, Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja experienced episodes of intense elevated and rapid heart beats, in addition to laboured breathing, and was transferred to the emergency room at the military BDF Hospital. The emergency room doctor stated that he must be immediately referred to a cardiologist. However, Al-Khawaja was denied access to a cardiologist at that time.

At that time, Professor Damian McCormack, BSc, MCh, FRCS (Orth.) provided expert medical opinion on Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja's condition and advised on crucial next steps. Based on the information available, Professor McCormack stated "I am very alarmed at the news that Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja has been refused cardiology assessment and denied treatment while suffering from a symptomatic cardiac arrhythmia, possible atrial fibrillation, which puts him at immediate risk of both heart attack and stroke." He has also advised that Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja should see a cardiologist

immediately and may need to be fitted with a defibrillator. Most recently, Professor McCormack has advised that Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja may not survive for more than a few days given his deteriorating condition, chronic health issues, and the potential for sudden, fatal cardiac arrest.

Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja has been facing a systematic denial of medical treatment by the Bahraini prison administration. According to reports, necessary medical treatment has been actively withheld from him by the Bahraini authorities, and access to medical appointments has been denied. As a direct result of the well-documented torture and mistreatment the human rights defender endured at the hands of the Bahraini authorities, Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja additionally suffers from a series of chronic and degenerative health problems and requires timely, expert medical treatment.

Front Line Defenders is profoundly concerned for the health of Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja. It urges the Bahraini authorities to allow Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja to have immediate and unconditional access to healthcare, and take all measures to guarantee his physical and psychological integrity and security. Front Line Defenders also urges the Bahraini government to immediately drop all charges against Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja and release him as it believes he is being detained solely as a result of his peaceful and legitimate human rights work.

**Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Bahrain to:**

1. Take all necessary measures to guarantee the physical and psychological integrity and security of Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja by transferring him to a tertiary level cardiac care unit for diagnostics and treatment;
2. Promptly and unconditionally release Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja, and facilitate his medical evacuation to Denmark, based on these urgent medical grounds;
3. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in Bahrain are free to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions.