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## **Maryam Al-Khawaja: Bahraini human rights defender must be immediately released**

**London, 1 September 2014** – REDRESS strongly condemns the detention in Bahrain on Saturday 30 August 2014 of prominent Bahraini human rights defender Maryam Al-Khawaja. We call on the Bahraini authorities to release her immediately, as well as to release 13 other leading human rights defenders, including her father Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja, who are in jail serving lengthy prison terms after taking part in peaceful demonstrations demanding reform during the Arab Spring uprising in 2011.

*“REDRESS urges the international community, including diplomatic representatives in Bahrain and neighbouring Arab and Middle East States, to urgently press the Bahraini Government to free Maryam and all the other human rights defenders unjustly jailed in that country, and to ensure they are not mistreated,”* said REDRESS Director Carla Ferstman.

Ms Al-Khawaja is co-director of the Gulf Centre for Human Rights. She is a Danish-Bahraini citizen. Ms Al-Khawaja was apprehended by authorities on her arrival at Bahrain International Airport on Saturday. She had travelled to Bahrain in an attempt to see her father, who had been on hunger strike since 24 August to protest his detention. On Sunday, she was charged with insulting the King, assaulting police officers and being involved with the rights campaign “Wanted for Justice.” Apparently, she has said that security officials told her that she was not welcome in Bahrain and that her Bahraini nationality had been revoked. She also has said she was not allowed to see a lawyer before her subsequent interrogation. She was then transferred for seven days to Isa Town Women’s Prison pending a court hearing.

REDRESS is gravely concerned for Ms Al-Khawaja safety, given the ongoing allegations of torture of detainees and political prisoners in Bahrain.

*“It is vital that Danish consular officials urgently request and are given immediate access to Maryam to assess her welfare. Bahrain acceded to the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations in 1992 and it must grant such access without delay. Experience shows that mistreatment of detainees often occurs in the first few days in custody, and therefore timely consular access is of the essence, particular in a State such as Bahrain where there is so much torture,”* said Ms Ferstman.

REDRESS calls on European Union Member States to join forces, in accordance with the EU Guidelines on Human Rights Defenders - which place particular attention on the risks faced by women human rights defenders, to condemn Maryam’s arrest, and to pursue additional demarches. REDRESS also urges the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders, Michel Forst, to examine and respond to information concerning Maryam’s arrest.

The Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry (BICI) (an independent inquiry into events in Bahrain in 2011) uncovered systematic mistreatment of opposition protestors and political activists in custody. Among the techniques documented by the BICI report were: blindfolding; beating; hitting the detainees with rubber hoses, whips or wooden planks; electrocution; sleep deprivation; and threats of rape of the detainee or family members. All of these findings were accepted by King Hamad in November 2011; he said that they “must be dealt with urgently”. However, Bahrain has not met many of these commitments. REDRESS continues to receive regular reports of torture and ill-treatment in the post-BICI period. Human rights defenders and political activists such as Maryam Al-Khawaja are particularly at risk of such abuse.

**For further information or to seek an interview with the relatives of Mrs Maryam Al-Khawaja** please contact Eva Sanchis, REDRESS’ Communications officer on [eva@redress.org](mailto:eva@redress.org) or +44 (0) 20 7793 1777 (office) or +44 (0) 7857110076 (mobile).

**About REDRESS:** REDRESS has been helping torture survivors obtain justice and reparation since 1992. It works in partnership with like-minded organisations around the world to end impunity and eradicate the practice of torture worldwide. REDRESS has intervened in a range of leading torture cases in the UK and abroad. More information about our work is available on [www.redress.org](http://www.redress.org).

REDRESS has been assisting Bahraini torture survivors to seek justice since the late 1990s. It has testified in the House of Lords on this issue and has brought to the attention of relevant UN human rights experts several cases involving the torture of political dissidents, including during the Arab Spring uprising.

On 25 August 2014, REDRESS and 13 other human rights organisations wrote a joint letter to King Hamad urging his government to immediately release the 13 high-profile detainees imprisoned unjustly, and to allow an independent assessment of the therapeutic needs of all persons who were mistreated during their detention.

In July 2014 REDRESS also wrote to British Foreign Secretary Philip Hammond expressing concern over the human rights situation in Bahrain and urging him to display consistency in the UK’s foreign policy towards the country: the FCO still does not consider Bahrain a “country of concern”. The letter was signed by a broad coalition of human rights organisations.

For more information on our work in Bahrain, see: <http://www.redress.org/middle-east-and-north-africa/bahrain>