

Press Release

# **Bahrain: COUNTDOWN TO FORMULA 1 - How long will our friend and former colleague Abdulhadi Alkhawaja survive?**

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**Today the Supreme Judicial Council of Bahrain refused to allow Abdulhadi Alkhawaja to travel to Denmark for medical treatment. Today is also the anniversary of Abdulhadi's brutal arrest and detention and marks his 60<sup>th</sup> day on hunger strike.**



*Abdulhadi AlKhawaja in hospital, April 6, 2012*

PRESS RELEASE - For immediate release

"Front Line Defenders rejects the self-serving arguments of the Government of Bahrain that there are no security concerns in advance of the Formula 1 Grand Prix. They are choosing to ignore the shadow cast over the whole event by the critical condition of human rights defender Abdulhadi AlKhawaja" said Front Line Defenders Executive Director Mary Lawlor in Dublin today.

As the Bahrain Government and the leaders of Formula 1 maintain the ignominious charade of their dialogue of the deaf, an innocent man who has devoted his life to defending the rights of others is facing death. The count down has started to the celebrations linked to the Formula 1 Grand Prix - sadly a different count down is under way for Abdulhadi whose life is in imminent danger.

The Formula 1 authorities and the Government of Bahrain have made repeated statements seeking to reassure F1 fans that all will be well and that the Grand Prix will go ahead as if there was no shadow over this event. On 28<sup>th</sup> March the Daily Telegraph reported a FIA spokesperson saying: "We welcome the spirit of reconciliation expressed by all parties and look forward to an exciting F1 race at the Bahrain International Circuit." The arguments put forward by the Formula 1 authorities and the Government in support of "business as normal" are both spurious and disingenuous.

The reality is that the Formula 1 authorities do not seem to have spoken with all relevant parties in Bahrain and have instead relied on the assurances of the Bahraini Government. It is crucial that they speak with independent civil society, community leaders and opposition political figures in Bahrain.

“Having just returned from Bahrain where I witnessed the indiscriminate use of tear gas and met with the families and lawyers of those who continue to be detained and persecuted I can assure the Formula 1 authorities that the situation in the country has not returned to normal. Bahrain is definitely not a safe country for Bahrainis”, said Ms Lawlor.

“The security forces violently disperse protests on a nightly basis. There has been no resolution of the political crisis that has brought thousands of protesters onto the streets. If they proceed to blindly accept the assurances of the Bahraini authorities without speaking to representatives of the majority of the population who seek change they risk to see a lot of tear gas and maybe worse on the weekend of 20-22<sup>nd</sup> April”, added Ms Lawlor.

Former Formula 1 World champion Damon Hill put his finger on the nub of the matter when he said “What we must put above all else is what will be the penalty in terms of human cost if the race goes ahead....It would be a bad state of affairs, bad for F1, to be seen to be enforcing martial law to hold the race.”

The Formula 1 authorities are seeking reassurances from the Bahraini authorities that all necessary steps will be taken to ensure that the race can go ahead safely. On that basis the Formula 1 leadership as well as the Government of Bahrain will be jointly responsible for whatever consequences arise from their insistence on going ahead with the F1 Grand Prix irrespective of the wishes of the people of Bahrain and the clear evidence of significant local opposition.

To the Formula 1 authorities Front Line Defenders would further add - the Bahrain police have used excessive and lethal force against demonstrators, they have abused and ill treated prisoners and subjected them to torture including sexual assault. Are they to be relied upon to provide security and protection to F1 fans? “But overshadowing all these considerations is the fact that the life of my brave and determined friend Abdulhadi hangs in the balance. His long service as a human rights defender working peacefully for the rights of others has made him a hero to many in Bahrain and across the region. If he dies before the Bahrain Grand Prix on the 22<sup>nd</sup> April it is impossible to imagine how it could go ahead”, said Ms Lawlor.

The FIA has said that they are “constantly monitoring and evaluating the situation in the Kingdom of Bahrain,” and “are in daily touch with the highest authorities, the main European embassies and of course the local promoters at BIC (Bahrain International Circuit) as well as the international promoter.” It would be an act of generosity and basic human decency for the FIA to use those contacts before it is too late to secure the release of Abdulhadi Alkhawaja and ask that he be allowed to travel to Denmark for medical treatment as offered by the Danish Government. ENDS

## **Front Line Defenders**

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION PLEASE CONTACT

JIM LOUGHRAN - FRONT LINE DEFENDERS - HEAD OF COMMUNICATION

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**P.S.**

\* Source : [www.frontlinedefenders.org/node/17949](http://www.frontlinedefenders.org/node/17949)