Joint global civil society letter:

RELEASE MARYAM AL-KHAWAJA AND END CLAMPDOWN ON CIVIL SOCIETY IN BAHRAIN

18 September 2014

HM Shaikh Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa
Office of His Majesty the King
Rifa'a Palace, al-Manama, Bahrain

Dear King Hamad,

We, the undersigned civil society organisations from around the world write to you united in our condemnation of the politically motivated arrest of human rights defender and co-director of the Gulf Centre for Human Rights, Maryam Al-Khawaja at Manama airport on 30 August 2014. We urge that Maryam is immediately and unconditionally released.

We believe that Maryam Al-Khawaja is being persecuted for exercising her legitimate rights to freedom of expression and association in the defence of fundamental freedoms including her co-operation with international institutions and her important role in documenting human rights violations in Bahrain. We stand in solidarity with Maryam and all other human rights defenders wrongly imprisoned by your government for their work and beliefs.

We remind you that the harassment, intimidation or stigmatization of a human rights defender, including arrest, detention, trial or imprisonment for reasons of the opinions they may hold, constitute a serious violation of Bahrain’s obligations under international law.

We remain concerned that since the pro-democracy protests intensified in February 2011 your government has deliberately subverted democratic freedoms using a combination of legal and extra-legal measures involving politically motivated prosecutions, brutal crackdowns on protests and silencing expressions of dissent in the print and online media. Many have raised the concern about the arbitrary detention of hundreds of pro-democracy activists and their being subjected to torture and ill-treatment in detention centres across Bahrain.

At the UN Human Rights Council, during Bahrain’s Universal Periodic Review (UPR) in 2012 your government agreed to protect human rights defenders and allow them to conduct their work without hindrance, intimidation or harassment. On 5 September 2014, a group of United Nations independent human rights experts also demanded Maryam Al-Khawaja’s release, and urged you to follow through on your commitments made during the UPR to end the persecution of all human rights defenders in Bahrain. We support Maryam’s courage and strength for advocating for democratic change.
We urge your government to recognise the legitimate demands of the Bahraini people for their rights and end the cycle of protest and repression. We thus call upon you to begin a process of democratic reform, healing and reconciliation in Bahrain. Key steps towards achieving the above would be to release all detained human rights defenders and prisoners of conscience and cease the oppression of human rights defenders, journalists and civil society organizations.

1. Accion Solidaria on HIV/AIDS – Venezuela
2. African Life Center – USA
3. African Women’s Active Nonviolence Initiatives for Social Change (AWANICH) - Democratic Republic of the Congo
4. Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK) - Bangladesh
5. Althria Agro-Environmental Research and Action Team – Greece
6. Aman Network for Rehabilitation & Defending Human Rights – United Kingdom
7. Americans for Democracy & Human Rights in Bahrain (ADHRB) – USA
8. Andalus Institute for Tolerance & Anti-violence Studies – Egypt
9. Arab Network for Democratic Elections – Lebanon
10. Arab NGO Network for Development (ANND) – Lebanon
11. Arabic Network for Human Rights Information (ANHRI) – Egypt
12. ARTICLE 19 – UK
13. Asian Human Rights Commission – Hong Kong
15. Association Dea Dia from Serbia - Serbia
16. Association for Progressive Communications – South Africa
17. Association for Women’s Rights in Development (AWID) -Canada
18. Association Transparence et Développement (ATED) – Mauritania
19. Avocats Sans Frontières Network – France
20. Bahrain Centre for Human Rights (BCHR) – Bahrain
21. Bahrain Human Rights Observatory (BHRO) - Bahrain
22. Bahrain Institute for Rights and Democracy (BIRD) – United Kingdom
23. Bahrain Rehabilitation & Anti Violence Organization (BRAVO) - Bahrain
24. Bahrain Salam for Human Rights – United Kingdom
25. Baidarie Pakistan – Pakistan
26. Belgrade Center for Human Rights - Serbia
27. Bishkek Feminist Collective SQ – Kyrgyzstan
28. Buergewissen in Bielefeld- Germany
29. Building More Future Opportunities and Capacities (BMFOCA) – Nigeria
30. Burundi Child Rights Coalition (BCRC)– Burundi
31. Bytes for All – Pakistan
32. Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (CIHRS) - Egypt
33. Cambodia Center for Human Rights (CCHR) – Cambodia
34. Campaign Against Ignorance & Illiteracy (CAII) - Nigeria
35. Canadian Journalists for Free Expression (CJFE) – Canada
36. Center for Civil Liberties – Ukraine
37. Center for National and International Studies (CNIS) – Azerbaijan
38. Center for Peace and Human Rights of the Venezuelan Central University- Venezuela
39. Center for Peace Education - USA
41. Center of Studies on Justice and Resolution of 1325 – Democratic Republic of the Congo
42. Charity and Security Network - USA
43. Citizens for Democratic Rights in Eritrea – United Kingdom
44. Civic Initiatives – Serbia
45. CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation - South Africa
46. Civil Rights Defenders - Sweden
47. CIVILIS Human Rights – Venezuela
48. Coalition pour le Development et la Rehabiniltation Sociale (CODR UBUNTU) – Burundi
49. Community Empowerment for Progress Organization (CEPO) – South Sudan
50. Concertation Nationale de la Société Civile du Togo (CNSC Togo) - Togo
51. Corporación de Investigación y Acción Social y Económica (CIASE) – Colombia
52. Counseling Center for Transgender People Association – Turkey
53. Danish PEN – Denmark
54. Democracy Monitor – Azerbaijan
55. Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN) – Philippines
56. Diverse Voices and Action for Equality - Fiji
57. East and Horn of African Human Rights Defenders Project - Uganda
58. Egyptian Commission for Rights and Freedoms – Egypt
59. Egyptian Organization for Human Rights (EOHR) - Egypt
60. Elma7rosa Network for Advocacy Media & Arts - Egypt
61. English PEN – UK
62. Ethiopian Human Rights Project - Ethiopia
63. European Bahraini Organisation for Human Rights (EBOHR) – Switzerland
64. European Saudi Organizations for Human Rights - Germany
65. European Women's Lobby – Belgium
66. Families of Desaparecidos for Justice - Philippines
67. Federation of African Muslim Women in America (FAMWA) – USA
68. FIDH, within the framework of the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, France
69. Fontaine-ISOKO for Good Governance and Integrated Development- Burundi
70. Foundation of The Victims Of Abduction And Forced Disappearance (FVAFD) – Egypt
71. Freedom House – USA
72. Freedom International – Ghana
73. Freedom Now - USA
74. Front line Defenders – Ireland
75. Ghanaian Centre of PEN International - Ghana
76. Global Network of Women Peacebuilders (GNWP) –USA
77. Groupe des Experts Nationaux - Madagascar
78. Gulf Centre for Human Rights (GCHR) - Lebanon
79. Gulf Civil Society Association Forum - Kuwait
80. Helsinki Citizen's Assembly – Turkey
81. Human Rights Center "Viasna" – Belarus
82. Human Rights Concern Eritrea – United Kingdom
83. Human Rights Joint Platform (IHOP) – Turkey
84. Humanist Institute for Development Cooperation (HIVOS) – Netherlands
85. International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran – USA
86. International Centre for supporting Rights and Freedoms (ICSRF) - Egypt
87. International Commission of Jurists – Switzerland
88. International Movement Against All Forms of Discrimination and Racism (IMADR)- Japan
89. International Pen, San Miguel Chapter – Mexico
90. International Service for Human Rights - Switzerland
91. International Solidarity Network Women Living Under Muslim Laws - USA
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147. The Training Nest - Sri Lanka
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151. Treatment Advocacy and Literacy Campaign (TALC) – Zambia
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164. World Movement for Democracy - USA
165. World Organisation Against Torture, within the framework of the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders – Switzerland
166. Zambia Council for Social Development (ZCSD) – Zambia
167. Zeugmadi LGBT- Turkey
168. Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum – Zimbabwe
169. 1325 Policy Group – Sweden