

# BAHRAIN

*Issued by the "Bahrain Freedom Movement" to promote human and constitutional rights*

## **The Palestinian suffering echoes in Bahrain's daily protests**

Once again the Middle East has been thrown into more chaos and violence. The Israelis have engaged in a relentless war against the Palestinians and vowed to eliminate the resistance movements. This time the Israelis are not alone in the war; they are being assisted by several Arab regimes who are at war with their people. Unlike in previous wars, the Zionists are banking on this support, knowing that the balance of power may have shifted and they may have to pay much higher price for the survival of their political entity. It is possible that the war may be halted by the stiff resistance and the rising Israeli casualties. At the same time, some Arab regimes have come to their aid. The rulers of the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain have not hidden their dislike of the Palestinian movements. They see the Palestinian problem as a source of revolutionary influence on the Arab people and they like to see it coming to an end at any cost. In recent years both regimes became closer to Israel. This has created rifts within the Gulf Cooperation Council and is likely to lead to more fragmentation. Kuwait is the least inclined towards Israeli links. Both the government and the people have expressed solidarity with the Palestinians in the ongoing conflict.

Three years ago both governments of the UAE and Bahrain abandoned the Palestinian cause and adopted pro-Israeli stands and policies. Both ruling families normalised their relations with the Zionists and vowed to crackdown on their people who continue to support the Palestinians. In the process many natives were detained and tortured for taking political stands different from those of the two ruling families. Furthermore, the people of Bahrain has been engaged in relentless conflicts with the khalifi rulers for decades. They aspire to achieve a democratic transformation from authoritarianism and dictatorship. In this process they have paid dearly in human and material terms. Thousands of native Bahrainis remain behind bars, many being subjected to severe torture. The UAE government also cracked down on activists and locked up dozens of them for years. The third country that has been flirting with the Israelis is Saudi Arabia. The two sides were negotiating the normalisation of relations before the recent flare up happened last month. The Saudis are known for their hu-

man rights violations. At present hundreds of political prisoners remain behind bars. Scores are executed every year and the public freedoms are severely curtailed.

In these domestic circumstances, the military conflict in Gaza erupted. Those regimes do not hide their desire to see the Palestinian groups like Hamad wiped out by Israel. They have repeatedly spoke of a "new Middle East" in which the Israelis play a pivotal role in its security and political structures. The situation is further polarised by the United States and its Western allies. They have all vowed to crack down on whom they call "Islamists" in the Arab countries. They are incensed by the growing influence of these groups in several countries. To them, Iran represents the epi-center of the Islamic movement and is considered its godfather. Despite fomenting sectarianism and extremism those groups have remained almost intact in many countries. The Israeli policies have helped to keep the revolutionary zeal strong. The Palestinians, through their suffering, resilience and resistance have been a factor in keeping the flame of unrest burning. Their steadfastness, suffering and determination has inspired generations of Arabs and Muslims to remain vigilant in world dominated by Western powers whose aim is to maintain their grip on the world affairs, support dictatorial rule and ensure the smooth flow of oil at reasonable rates and prices. To this end, the Western powers have viewed Israel as a fundamental power in the region whose role in defending their interests is irreplaceable.

What is next? As the war continues to threaten the peace and security of the region, the Arab people remain in constant anxiety and fear. The Bahrainis have taken to the streets in support of the Palestinians since the eruption of the ongoing war. The regime has been harsh in dealing with those peaceful expressions of opinion and stands. The protesters who have filled the streets and alleyways of towns and villages continue to sustain injury, arrest and torture. The Palestinian conflict has thus become a source of inflaming the feelings and encouraging the people to continue their protests. The country has become a hotspot for daily demonstrations, to the annoyance of the regime and its backers in Washington, London and Tel Aviv. The

regime feels that its close links to the West enable him to crack at will against the natives. The Western powers have not raised an eyebrow in the fact of the regime's onslaught against the natives. Their view is shaped more by material interests and less by pro-democracy considerations. The lack of Western faithfulness to the main slogans of democracy and human rights have led to a catastrophic loss of credibility on matters of values, principles and human concerns.

As the strife by the public in support of the Palestinian cause gains momentum, more groups are joining in despite the regime's brutality. Daily protests have continue unabated. With these protests came massive crackdown on the organisers and participants alike. Seminars are held at liberal institutions. Public display of support to the Palestinian cause is clear, with Palestinian flag raised at protests and homes alike Poetry is recited at meetings to discuss the issue. Sermons at mosques have concentrated on Palestine as the worshippers raised slogans and clinched their fists in defiance. Material help is being organized by the civil society bodies in defiance of the regime's ban. These days Bahrain appears to be embroiled in public display of support to Palestine and against the Zionist war on Gaza. People have stood in solidarity of the Palestinians at every level. The daily display of victims of the bombing of Gaza by the Zionists is adding fuel to an already volatile situation. To many the cause of Palestine cannot be dissociated from that of Bahrain. Seeking freedom, liberation and rights is the name of the game that the both occupier regimes seek to exploit and destroy. Bahrainis will continue their strife for Palestine. Religious scholars, poets, writers, men, women and children are actively participating in the protests and demonstrations. The regime has issued warnings to school and university students not to participate in pro-Palestine activities, but the people defied those warnings and are ready to pay the price. After all, most Bahraini youths have been through the prison experience and the threats have thus fallen on deaf ears. They have developed immunity against such warnings and are ready to pay what it takes to support Palestine.

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## Bahrainis detained for Gaza protests, Ethiopians protest killings by Saudis

As the native Bahrainis continue their protests against the continuing bombing of Gaza by the Israeli forces, the khalifi regime has continued its crackdown on those taking part in those protests. This week several Bahrainis were detained. Mohammed ALQallaf and Sayed Ayman Mustafa were arrested and remanded in custody for seven days. They are accused of participating in pro-Palestine protests. Another boy was also arrested. Muhammad Alyan was taken to Roundabout 17 police station and subjected to horrific treatment and abuse. Then he was arrested. Also Abdul Aziz Shakir Ali Al Shawk from Sanad town was attacked in his car and taken to custody where he was severely interrogated. He was detained for seven days for taking part in protest against the bombing of Gaza. Two other Bahraini minors have been taken into custody after being sentenced to a year in prison. Sajjad Jaafar and Hussein Ayoub were jailed for joining peaceful protests. There were massive demonstrations in Duraz, Al Dair, Al-Sanabis and elsewhere. They raised banners calling for the war to stop and for the UN to start war crimes tribunals to try the Israeli leaders who have committed serious crimes against humanity.

The khalifi regime forces have also summoned two children. Yousef and Yassin Fadel Al-Tajer, aged eight and six respectively, for questioning over their participation in pro-Palestine peaceful demonstrations. The Bahrain Institute for Rights and Democracy (BIRD) said special forces and officers recently used "excessive force" against political prisoners and tortured many of them. Some were held incommunicado for up to 36 days, it said.

Last Friday 270 religious scholars signed a statement in support of Palestine and

against the Israeli aggression. They called on the world community to take appropriate actions against the Israeli occupiers for their crimes against the Palestinians. They emphasised their inalienable right to defend themselves and their land. They said that it is the nature of the Zionist enemy to kill and maim. They also called for boycotting the Israeli occupiers and enforce sanctions on them. The Israeli ambassador in Bahrain must be expelled, they said.

On 24 October 2023, the European Court for Human Rights ruled unanimously that the Netherlands was to pay Bahraini refugee Ali al-Showeikh "50,000 euros (EUR) in respect of non-pecuniary damage." A press release issued by the Registrar of the Court stated that "Dutch authorities' assessment of risks when expelling a Bahraini national to his country of origin was not rigorous enough." The Court concluded that "the Dutch authorities had failed to properly assess the alleged risk to the applicant of ill-treatment before removing him to Bahrain in the context of his last-minute asylum application, in violation of Article 3 (procedural obligations)." On 20 October 2018, Mr al-Showeikh was expelled from the Netherlands following a rejection of his asylum claim and forcibly returned to Bahrain. According to Amnesty International, he was arrested at the airport and interrogated by the Criminal Investigations Directorate for 11 days during which time he was denied access to a lawyer. On 28 February 2019, Bahraini court sentenced him to life imprisonment relying on coerced confessions and stripped him of his Bahraini citizenship in an unfair trial. He was accused of terrorism charges that could not be proven. He was then given another sentence of six

years (5+1) on separate political charges. It is now one year since detained Saudi human rights defender Mohammed al-Qahtani has been allowed any contact with his family, with misleading details about his whereabouts. Seventeen human rights bodies have signed a letter calling for his immediate and unconditional release. They said: We, the undersigned organisations, reiterate our call on Saudi Arabia's authorities to disclose the whereabouts of detained Saudi human rights defender Mohammad al-Qahtani and allow him contact with his family. Al-Qahtani has been forcibly disappeared for a whole year and must be released immediately and unconditionally. They added: We urge the authorities to allow him immediate contact with his family and provide him with the necessary medical care. Saudi Arabia must ensure a free and enabling environment for all human rights defenders, and allow them to carry out their legitimate activities without undue restrictions or fear of reprisals.

Ethiopian activists have held several protests at Saudi embassies in several countries against the killing of Ethiopian migrants at Saudi borders. In June 800 were killed in cold blood as they approached the border from Yemen. In the past week Saudi authorities arrested 15,453 people for breaching residency, work and border security regulations, the Saudi Press Agency reported. According to an official report, a total of 9,865 people were arrested for violations of residency laws, while 3,610 were held over illegal border crossing attempts and a further 1,978 for labor-related issues.

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## Bahraini Pro-Palestine activists detained, Saudis urged not to execute Al-Derazi

The ongoing Zionist war on Palestinians has intensified the polarization in the political map in Bahrain. The daily demonstrations by the native Bahrainis in support of the people of Palestine is contrasted by the pro-Israel stands of the khalifi dictators. The past week witnessed unprecedented protests by the people against the declared policy of the regime calling it treachery, betrayal and a war on humanity. The exposure of the khalifi dictator and his clique as enemies of the Palestinian cause has angered the regime and caused it to commit more crimes against the native Bahrainis. The multiple daily protests have covered most towns and villages. Mosque Imams have declared their pro-Palestinian stands openly. Senior religious leaders have been open about their stand from the beginning.

First there have been the statements of support for the Palestinian victims of the Israeli killing machines. Ayatullah Sheikh Isa Qasim has been vocal in his principled stand, lambasting the Zionist attacks on the civilian population. The senior scholars inside

Bahrain issued statements of support for the people of Palestine and called for the expulsion of the Israeli ambassador. The foreign minister of the khalifi regime has been disowned by some members of his tribe for supporting the Zionists. But what has startled many is the reaction of the native prisoners of conscience. From their torture chambers they issued statements expressing solidarity with the people of Palestine and asking the khalifi regime to expel the Israeli ambassador. The senior jailed figures of the Revolution have also issued a statement of support of the Palestinians. The khalifi regime has been angered by these statements that have exposed how isolated are the khalifis and how they are totally at odds with the natives in their perceptions and alliances.

The khalifi security forces have intensified their crackdown against pro-Palestine protests with several people arrested in recent days. The latest to be detained is Yasser Saeed (from Salmabad town). He was arrested after being summoned for question-

ing by police over his participation in Friday's mass protests denouncing Israel's onslaught on Gaza. Other detainees include: Ali Jum'a (from samaheej town), Mohammed Al Qallaf (from Al Nu'aim District of Manama), Sayed Ayman Mustafa Alawi (from Ghuraifa). They have been detained for at least a week 'pending an investigation.' Two other native Bahrainis were snatched from inside the khalifi court to serve one year prison sentence: Hussain Ayyoub, from Abu Quwwa and Sajjad Jaffar from Abu Saibaa.

Several activities have been held by the people in support of the Palestinians. The Committee Against Normalisation held a protest opposite the Palestinian Embassy in Manama. The khalifis had refused to grant permission to the protest, but when the Palestinian Ambassador requested the permission, it was given. Today a massive protest is expected to take place at the Financial Harbour in the heart of the capi-

## Bahrainis react to the Palestine crisis, Saudis urged to stop death penalty

The events in Palestine have impacted on the native Bahrainis who rushed to the streets to support the cause and express solidarity with the victims. Demonstrations took place in many towns and villages, day and night. Palestinian flags were raised and pro-Palestine slogans were raised. Many drew parallels between Bahrain and Palestine arguing that both countries are under occupation and the people of both countries are subjected to persecution, harassment, killing, displacement and imprisonment. Since the khalifi dictators normalized their relations with Israel three years ago, the people have drawn a line in the relations with their dictators whom they accuse of treachery and betrayal of the Palestinian cause. They also called for the expulsion of the Israeli ambassador from the country. The whole country has been incensed by the statement of the khalifi foreign ministry which was hostile to the Palestinians and sympathetic with the occupiers.

Meanwhile the regime has continued its persecution policies. This week two native youths were arrested after severe interrogation by the torture officers. Saeed Ali Abdulla Abdul Karim and Muhammed Shawqi were detained and transferred to prison cells. The second boy was taken to the Dry Dock Detention Centre. Two native Bahrainis who had completed their prison sentences have not been released. Alawi Al Wadaei ended his eight years prison sentence and was due to be freed. But the khalifi officials invented a new charge of "assault" during prison riots on 17th April 2021. He was given a new sentence of three years. Hassan Ali Al Shuwaikh had completed ten years but was remanded again to serve the new three years sentence. This ill-treatment amounts to immoral persecution. The new sentences were imposed without proper

trials.

Last week political prisoner Mohammed Abbas Abdul Rasool was transferred from his cell to Salmaniya Hospital. He was in a critical condition that demanded an immediate operation. Since his arrest three weeks ago he has been subjected to severe torture causing him severe injuries that necessitated immediate surgery. Another political Prisoner, Abdul Aziz Abdul Reda has been on hunger strike since 19th September in protest against his treatment. He is asking for a retrial in a court of law to prove his innocence. He had committed no crime that is punishable by law and is considered "prisoner of conscience".

In its annual 2023 Country Report, Freedom House discussed the internet freedom in Bahrain. The report's overview said: "Internet freedom in Bahrain remains restricted. Authorities frequently block websites and force the removal of online content, particularly social media posts criticizing the government. While social media remains a key space for activism and dissent, self-censorship is high due to the fear of online surveillance and intimidation from authorities. Journalists and activists who work online continue to face criminal penalties, extralegal harassment, and invasive surveillance by the state. The monarchy dominates state institutions, and elections for the lower house of parliament are no longer competitive or inclusive. Since violently crushing a popular prodemocracy protest movement in 2011, the monarchy has systematically eliminated a broad range of political rights and civil liberties, dismantled the political opposition, and cracked down harshly on persistent dissent among the Shiite population."

This week the UN Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association, Clement Nyaletsossi Voule, reiterated his call to Bahrain to re-

lease Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja, being a "prisoner of conscience". Nyaletsossi said in a video posted by the "Bahrain Center for Human Rights" on the "X" platform that "In February 2023, my colleagues and I raised our concern to Bahrain government about the detention of Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja who was arrested in April 2011 for participating in the peaceful protest requesting political reform." On the International Day against the Death Penalty on 10th October, 76 parliamentarians from national and EU parliaments have signed a joint statement expressing concern at the alarming escalation in use of the death penalty in Saudi Arabia and calling on the Saudi authorities to implement a moratorium on executions and adopt legal reforms. The statement, organised by ALQST, has been signed by 13 Members of the European Parliament (MEPs), 28 German MdBs, 11 British MPs, 11 Irish Parliamentarians and 13 French Parliamentarians. It notes the soaring rate of executions since the rise to power of Mohammed bin Salman and King Salman, with 196 individuals executed in 2022 alone and 110 this year so far (as of 10 October). The statement also refers to regressive trends which contradict pledges made by the authorities, including the resumption of executions for drug-related offences and the sentencing to death of several young men for offences that took place when they were minors.

Human rights activists are calling for the immediate and unconditional release of a young Saudi man who has spent five years behind bars. Abdullah al-Derazi celebrated his 28th birthday behind bars. His family is extremely sad and worried for his life. He has been on death for taking part in peaceful protests to call for political reforms. He was only 17 years of age when he joined the demonstrations in the Eastern Province.

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tal. There are fears that the khalifis may use force to prevent the protest.

Mary Lawlor UN Special Rapporteur HRDs tweeted the following: "Hearing disturbing news that Bahraini woman human rights defender (WHRD Ebtisam Alsaegh has been the target of defamatory tweets on her return to Bahrain after #HRC54 side events in Geneva. The tweets have not been taken down. HRDs must be protected from retaliation for engaging with the UN."

Political prisoner, Mohammed Al Raml, 63 has complained of serious dangers awaiting him that could seal his fate. He said: I feel in constant danger, especially as they transfer me to the hospital. He has been denied suitable treatment and those ailments have gradually become worse.

A Saudi human rights group has raised the alarm about the well-being of a political prisoner. ALQST said it is "very con-

cerned about Saudi activist Abdulrahman al-Khalidi, detained in Bulgaria since October 2021 after seeking asylum there. He is at risk of being deported to Saudi Arabia, where there are potential threats to his life and liberty."

On 16th October, a UN expert expressed concern at the imminent execution in Saudi Arabia of Abdullah Al-Derazi, who is falsely accused of committing a crime when he was a child. Despite issuing a Royal Decree

in 2020 aiming to abolish the death penalty for child defendants, including those convicted of terrorism offences, it is deeply concerning that the application of the decree remains uncertain," said Morris Tidball-Binz the UN Special Rapporteur on summary, extrajudicial or arbitrary executions. "There were seven charges listed on Al-Derazi's chargesheet, none of which were dated. The prosecution's only evidence was his allegedly coerced confession," Tidball-

Binz said. UN experts have previously condemned the overly broad definition of "terrorism" under Saudi law, which facilitates the qualification of civil disobedience and critical views of the Government as "terrorist" acts. The Special Rapporteur called on Saudi Arabia to publish the text of the 2020 Royal Decree and enforce it for all defendants below the age of 18, regardless of their crime.

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## The Trying Path of Peaceful Resistance

Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja is a Danish-Bahraini political activist who has given decades of his life to defending human rights and promoting democracy. Despite the peaceful nature of his activism, he had been forced to live in exile for many years and was subjected to several arrests after finally returning to his home country. In 2011, he was sentenced to life in prison for leading non-violent protests during the Bahraini Uprising. His health is rapidly deteriorating, but Mr. Al-Khawaja is denied a medical furlough, and his family lives in constant fear of losing him. This article would not have been written without their help, for which Aurora is very grateful.

As a young man studying in the United Kingdom in the late 1970s, Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja participated in the students' protests aimed at raising awareness of the human rights violations in Bahrain. That defiance did not go unnoticed, and young Bahrainis like him were told to return home immediately – or be prepared to have their passports canceled. Having heard numerous stories about his friends being subjected to imprisonment after coming back, Mr. Al-Khawaja decided to stay in Europe and continue his work there. As a result, his Bahraini citizenship was revoked by the state.

The activist found shelter in refugee camps and was granted political asylum in Denmark in 1991, together with his wife and children. Two years later, after the death of his father, Mr. Al-Khawaja attempted to go to Bahrain to attend the funeral. He was denied entry and interrogated for several days before being deported back to Denmark. However, even this tragic episode did not discourage him.

While living in Europe, he became a key person for many refugees from the Gulf region seeking justice and support in their struggles. To fulfill the growing need for a structured response, he co-founded the Bahrain Human Rights Organization (BHRO) based in Denmark. Mr. Al-Khawaja's tireless advocacy and persistence have directly contributed to the political changes that happened after Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa succeeded his late father as the new King of Bahrain.

In 2001, the new monarch tried to redeem the regime's global image by offering general amnesty to dissidents and political prisoners. Dozens of Bahraini nationals living in forced exile, including Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja, were allowed to go back. This positive development, along with other promises made by the authorities, including reinstating some amended parts of the suspended constitution and implementing further democratic reforms, convinced Mr. Al-Khawaja and other activists that their dreams of a democratic future might just come true. In 2002, he opened the Bahrain Center for Human Rights (BCHR) to promote fundamental human rights.

In September 2004, after Mr. Al-Khawaja

publicly blamed the prime minister for his decisions negatively affecting the country's economic development and his role in human rights abuses, the activist was detained and charged with disseminating 'false news' and inciting contempt towards the government. The BCHR was ordered to close down and its registration with the state was revoked. Defiantly, the Center remains in operation to this day.

Upon his release on a royal pardon in October 2004, Mr. Al-Khawaja continued to publicly criticize the monarchical regime for violating human rights, impeding the democratic process, and inciting discrimination against the Sunni minority. "If people move to gain their rights, to protect their rights, and the government has some kind of reaction, it's not the people's fault. It's the government's fault," said Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja in an interview given in 2005.

In 2011, Mr. Al-Khawaja co-founded the Gulf Center for Human Rights, which provides support and protection to human rights defenders. As a result of his work, he has faced unjust detention, unfair trials, harassment, defamation campaigns in the media, and physical violence. In fact, all of the Al-Khawaja family members have been affected by state-sanctioned persecution.

Abdulhadi's younger brother, two sons-in-law, two daughters, and even his young grandson have been imprisoned at some point (as a minor, the latter was briefly detained with his mother, Zaynab). Abdulhadi's elderly mother, who still lives in Bahrain, hasn't seen him for years. "This is something the Bahraini government does. They target families. You literally have one person at the dinner table on some days, because everybody else is exiled or in prison," explains Zaynab Al-Khawaja.

In February 2011, during what became known as the 'Arab Spring' uprisings, Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja was in charge of leading several peaceful demonstrations and marches in Bahrain that reflected the public demand for democratic reforms across the Middle East/North Africa (MENA) region. The state retaliation was swift and brutal. In April 2011, Mr. Al-Khawaja was violently apprehended in his own home in the middle of the night, while his family watched in horror.

During the arrest, he was dragged down the stairs by the neck, beaten and then taken away unconscious. His family was not allowed to contact him for several days after that. In detention, he was repeatedly tortured and survived an assault attempt that resulted in requiring urgent medical attention.

When the activist was taken to the hospital, he was threatened with execution by security personnel. Upon his return to prison, he was put in solitary confinement for two months.

In June 2011, Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja was sentenced to life in

prison by a military tribunal for 'founding a terrorist organization' and an 'attempt to overthrow the government by force.' No convincing evidence was presented in court to validate those claims. After the verdict was read, he was again beaten by court officers for addressing his supporters in the room. Since then, he has remained imprisoned.

The activist has organized multiple hunger strikes to force the prison administration to respect the detainees' rights. In January 2012, he began an open-ended hunger strike that lasted for 110 days, severely weakening him. When his wife Khadija al-Mousawi visited him in April 2012, he told her he was drugged and force-fed without consent.

His health has been deteriorating ever since he was arrested. There is a risk he might lose his eyesight; he has chronic back and jaw pain caused by the beatings and has also developed heart palpitations. "We've always been concerned about my dad's health, but none of it compares to his recent heart issues. We've never been as scared as we are now," says Zaynab Al-Khawaja. After in-person visits were replaced with calls, they were often canceled without a warning. On at least one occasion, instead of being allowed to talk to his family, the activist was taken to another room where police officers shouted insults at him for half an hour, while he kept trying to tell them he was unwell.

In early September 2023, after the latest hunger strike put additional strain on Mr. Al-Khawaja's exhausted organism, his daughter Maryam Al-Khawaja, who has also followed in his footsteps as yet another human rights defender in the family, decided that she would try to go to Bahrain to save her father. She was denied boarding on a Manama-bound flight in London, depriving her of what she described as probably her 'last chance to see her dad.'

Sadly, it seems unlikely that the merciless vise of the Bahraini justice system will ever release its righteous victim, but Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja's family will never give up on the fight. He would expect nothing less from them. "When a person goes through a lot, sometimes, you get sad or feel a little bit broken. To me, it's really amazing how happy my father is. He finds joy in standing up for human rights and his beliefs. He always tells us, to this day, that it's an honor for us to be given the chance to do this work that we're doing. And that is the thing I would like the people around the world to know about him," says Zaynab Al-Khawaja.

Even after spending over a decade in detention and being subjected to unimaginable abuse, Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja has not lost the spirit of compassion and humanity that drove him to the human rights movement in the first place. He also retained his boundless courage. "If I die, I ask the people to continue on path of peaceful resistance," said Mr. Al-Khawaja on a rare occasion when he was permitted to contact the outside world. "I don't want anybody to be hurt in my name."

