

# Defend Maryam Al-Khawaja

by David Binns (UCU London Retired Members)

**Maryam Al-Khawaja**, a leading member of the [Bahrain Center for Human Rights](#) (BCHR), was arrested in late August as she tried to enter Bahrain to visit her father, Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja. Abdulhadi, himself former president of BCHR, is presently on hunger strike while serving a life sentence imposed by the National Safety Court, a Bahraini military entity, for human rights activities.



BCHR, together with the [Gulf Center for Human Rights](#) (GCHR), has been prominent in support of the Bahrain Teachers Association (BTA), a body which came under state attack for supporting the movement for democratic reform that surfaced in Bahrain in 2011. Over a year ago the University and College Union (UCU) passed a motion, put forward by the London Retired Members branch, condemning the repression and urging solidarity activity both in Britain (a key supporter and underwriter of the mass murderous Bahraini regime) and internationally. The recent arrest of Maryam Al-Khawaja, together with the incarceration of her father and numerous other regime critics, leaves no doubt that the essential work remains to be done.

The Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders (OPHRD) has summarised the charges against Maryam and the circumstances surrounding her arrest as [follows...](#)

*"Ms. Al-Khawaja was accused and interrogated on charges of 'assault and battery against on-duty public employees during their performance of official duty'. The public prosecution alleges that she attacked a lieutenant and another policewoman and injured them when they asked her to hand over her mobile phone. Her lawyer said that the public prosecution denied Ms. Al-Khawaja the right to meet with him before the interrogation and that the lawyer himself was also denied the right to talk to her about her legal rights during interrogation."*

OPHRD add:

*"Her lawyer filed a complaint at the Public Prosecution for "assault" alleging that Ms. Al-Khawaja was injured during her arrest and presented medical reports proving bruises in her right arm. Her lawyer also reported that he was not able to speak with her before the hearing, and her family were denied entry in the courtroom."*

Maryam was conditionally released on 18th September and currently is no longer subject to preventive detention. However the charges still stand. Furthermore she is subject to a travel ban and required to guarantee a place of residence. Such are the conditions imposed on Maryam al-Khawaja pending trial on 1st October. Khalid Ibrahim of GCHR is quoted by [Index on Censorship](#) as calling on the Bahrain government to "drop the charges and free her without conditions." This clear minimal demand for the unconditional release of Maryam must be supported. Not only would it be a step toward the overcoming of gross injustice against one person. In the broader context such a step would without doubt further challenge the pattern of regime harassment and victimisation of critics. As such it would contribute to

resistance to the wider, imperially sustained assault on trade unionists and rights activists in Bahrain and in the Gulf states more generally. As much as anywhere within that region, democratic and labour movement issues intertwine in Bahrain to the point to being inseparable. Trade unions, it follows, should intervene to both raise awareness of the character of the regime and to organise specific solidarity activity - especially in Britain, where core elements within the state and ruling class move in lockstep with the Bahraini tyranny.

### **Some Suggested Steps**

~ Time is short, so as a matter of urgency, raise opposition to the trial of Maryam al-Khawaja in your union branch. Where branch policy permits, chair's action should be used to circulate the Bahrain Institute for Rights & Democracy (BIRD) petition [Free Human Rights Activist Maryam Al Khawaja](#) among branch members and other labour movement contacts. When a branch meeting can be convened, or through chair's action, call for the charges to be dropped and for a union-led international investigation of ongoing Bahraini state repression and abuse of rights, including those of trade unionists. [Petition can be found here...](#)

~ To facilitate broader awareness of background, urge branch members to read the account of Maryam's work and arrest in the 5th September 2014 report by Amnesty, who identify her as a prisoner of conscience: [read it here...](#)

~ Trade unionists generally, support independent trade unions and democratisation movements in Bahrain:  
[more details...](#)

~ Members of UCU and other education unions, oppose state repression of the Bahrain Teachers Association. To read UCU material relating to BTA support, enter "Bahrain" in the search engine at: <http://www.ucu.org.uk/>

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