

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Public Statement

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Bahrain: Amnesty International welcomes the release of Abdul Hadi al-Khawaja

On 21 November human rights activist 'Abdul Hadi al-Khawaja was given a one-year prison sentence on charges which included "inciting hatred" and accusing the authorities of corruption, under provisions prescribed by the 1976 Penal Code. 'Abdul Hadi al-Khawaja decided to boycott the court hearing and consequently stayed in his cell on the day of the hearing.

However, later on the same day, 'Abdul Hadi al-Khawaja was released after the King, Shaikh Hamad bin 'Issa Al Khalifa, issued a decree which exempted him from spending the rest of his sentence in prison. The King also ordered the release of 13 other people who had remained in detention since their arrest on 28 October during a public demonstration.

Amnesty International sent a trial observer who attended the court session of 21 November. Having studied the charge sheet, the organization concluded that it considered 'Abdul Hadi al-Khawaja to be a prisoner of conscience and called for his immediate and unconditional release.

Amnesty International welcomes the release of 'Abdul Hadi al-Khawaja and the 13 other detainees but remains concerned that the 1976 Penal Code may be used again as a justification to restrict freedom of expression. The organization reiterates its call for the Code to be reviewed as soon as possible to ensure compliance with international human rights standards.