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FREEDOM NOW

MEDIA RELEASE

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FREEDOM NOW FILES PETITION TO UNITED NATIONS ON BEHALF OF ABDULHADI ALKHAWAJA TO OBTAIN OPINION THAT HIS ONGOING DETENTION VIOLATES INTERNATIONAL LAW

On September 19, 2011, Freedom Now filed an urgent action petition with the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention on behalf of Abdulhadi Alkhawaja. Freedom Now hopes to obtain a legal opinion from the Working Group that the Bahraini government's detention of Mr. Alkhawaja is in violation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Freedom Now Executive Director Maran Turner stated, "Mr. Alkhawaja's brutal arrest and conviction, as well as his treatment in detention are appalling. The actions by the Government of Bahrain are a clear violation of international law. It is our hope that a decision by the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention will compel the government to abide by its commitments under the law and release Abdulhadi Alkhawaja."

Mr. Alkhawaja has been a well regarded human rights defender for more than 20 years. Because of his tireless advocacy for peaceful reform in Bahrain, Mr. Alkhawaja has faced a long history of arrests and unlawful detention. Just before his current detention, Mr. Alkhawaja had publicly criticized the regime's brutal response to the recent anti-government protests in Bahrain.

The Bahraini government has detained Mr. Alkhawaja since April 9, 2011, in violation of both Bahraini and international law. During his arrest, 15 masked men forced entry into the apartment of Mr. Alkhawaja's daughter, breaking down the door with a sledgehammer. Without producing identification or an arrest warrant, they beat Mr. Alkhawaja until he lost consciousness and took him into custody along with his two sons-in-law. On May 8, 2011, the government initiated its prosecution of Mr. Alkhawaja and 20 other individuals before the National Safety Court – a military tribunal. Despite a lack of evidence against him, the military court convicted Mr. Alkhawaja of a number of charges, including financing and participating in terrorism to overthrow the government and spying for a foreign country. On June 22, 2011, authorities sentenced Mr. Alkhawaja to life imprisonment. Mr. Alkhawaja has filed an appeal, which has been postponed by the government until September 28, 2011.

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Our mission is to free prisoners of conscience through focused legal, political and public relations advocacy efforts.

Mr. Alkhawaja has been subjected to deplorable treatment during his detention. Because of the beatings he endured from security agents, he suffered four fractures to his face, requiring a four hour surgery to repair his jaw. Security forces are also subjecting Mr. Alkhawaja to other forms of inhumane treatment, such as attempted sexual assault and psychological torture.

Freedom Now represents Mr. Alkhawaja as his *pro bono* international legal counsel.

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