

**King Shaikh Hamad bin 'Issa Al Khalifa
Office of His Majesty the King
P.O. Box 555
Rifa'a Palace, al-Manama, Bahrain**

Brussels, the 15th of July 2013

Re: Concerns regarding the one-year prison sentence of Mr Mahdi al-Basri

Your Majesty,

I am writing to you on behalf of the Council of Bars and Law Societies of Europe (CCBE), which, through the national Bars and Law Societies of the Member States of the European Union and the European Economic Area, represents more than 1 million European lawyers. In addition to membership from EU bars, it also has observer representatives from a further eleven European countries' bars.

The CCBE, through its Human Rights Committee, places great emphasis on respect for human rights and the rule of law. The CCBE is particularly concerned by the situation of human rights defenders in the world.

The CCBE writes to express its serious concerns over the situation of Mr Mahdi al-Basri, a lawyer condemned to one year in prison for allegedly insulting the King of Bahrain in messages posted on social media website Twitter.

According to the information that we received, Mr al-Basri is being detained in Jaw Prison following his arrest during a police raid on his house in Karrana, on 11 March. Mr al-Basri is facing criminal charges under Article 214 of Bahrain's Penal Code, which criminalizes "offending the emir of the country [the King], the national flag or emblem".

The CCBE has been informed that the trial against Mr Mahdi al-Basri began on 24 March before Branch 3 of the Lower Criminal Court. Mr al-Basri was accused of posting the allegedly insulting messages on Twitter, which were traced to his IP address, in June 2012. On 15 May, the Court sentenced him to one year of imprisonment. On 3 July, this sentence was upheld by Branch 3 of the High Criminal Court of Appeal in Manama, the capital of Bahrain. According to our information, Mr al-Basri's lawyers will file an appeal with the Court of Cassation; however, there are fears that by the time the court reviews the case, Mr Mahdi al-Basri will have already served his sentence.

Especially worrisome is that Mr al-Basri has always denied the charges against him, and that trustworthy sources report that he might be a prisoner of conscience.

In this context, the CCBE wishes to draw to your attention Article 23 of the United Nations Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers (1990):

This article states that:

Lawyers like other citizens are entitled to freedom of expression, belief, association and assembly. In particular, they shall have the rights to take part in public discussion of matters concerning the law, the administration of justice and the promotion and protection of human rights and to join or form local, national or international organisations and attend their meetings, without suffering professional restrictions by reason of their lawful action or their membership in a lawful organisation. In exercising these rights, lawyers shall always conduct themselves in accordance with the law and the recognised standards and ethics of the legal profession.

In view of the above, the CCBE respectfully urges you to verify whether Mr Mahdi al-Basri can be considered a prisoner of conscience and – if this is the case – to take immediate and effective steps to guarantee his release. The CCBE also implores you to take all the necessary measures to ensure that the review of Mahdi al-Basri's case before the Court of Cassation takes place without delay and that all lawyers in Bahrain are free to exercise their freedom of expression without any fear of reprisal.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'E. Tsouroulis', written in a cursive style.

EVANGELOS TSOUROULIS
CCBE President