

RE HUNGER STRIKER ALI MUSHAIMA

We the undersigned medical team are writing regarding the situation of Ali Mushaima. He has been protesting the treatment of his father Hassan Mushaima, who has been arrested by the Bahraini authorities without access to his family, medical treatment or medical investigation.

For the last 43 days Ali Mushaima has been maintaining a hunger strike outside the Bahraini embassy in Belgravia Square. During this time, he has refused to eat and has only survived on fluids.

On the 30 August 2018 this took its toll on him and Ali was admitted to hospital due to a hypoglycaemic attack. He was put on a glucose drip and given intravenous saline to rehydrate him. He was discharged on the same day after a few hours, and went back to his vigil outside the embassy on the next day.

We have been visiting Ali over the last month nearly every day between us. In this time, we have seen a marked deterioration in his health and well-being.

Since the beginning of his hunger strike Ali has lost more than 16 kg in weight (20% of his total weight), and some of the symptoms he has developed are constant headaches, dizziness, fatigue, weakness and feeling cold. More recently he has started complaining of abdominal pain and increased lethargy.

These are some of the acute consequences of his protest, however, there is no doubt that there are and will be long standing implications of this action.

When the body is subjected to such stress, it enters a state of catabolism (whereby complex molecules within the body are broken into their simpler forms) if this continues then the process of starvation begins. Essentially the body stops using carbohydrate as fuel (because it is no longer receiving this as food) and starts to break down stores of energy in the body such as glycogen and fats which are essential to proper functioning of the body's systems. If this continues then the body starts to become ketogenic – i.e. production of harmful ketone bodies begins. Insulin stores are depleted, and then essential proteins and amino acids start to be degraded.

In summary the body starts to break itself down to survive, this will lead to eventual organ dysfunction and shut down. As Ali is approaching his 44th day there is a serious concern about some of the vital organs that could be (and may already have been) damaged, including the kidneys and liver. Based on medical reports of other hunger strikers, from about 40 days onward progressive confusion, incoherence, loss of hearing, blindness and bleeding may occur. There are also effects of hypoglycemia (low blood sugar) on the brain, causing confusion, disorientation and collapse (as happened in Ali's case).

Furthermore, the depletion of essential electrolytes and trace elements (e.g. Potassium and Magnesium) will have effects on the cardiac function, such as arrhythmia and cardiac arrest. These are merely, some of the potential physical sequelae of prolonged starvation.

Taking all these factors into consideration we strongly advise Ali Mushaima to stop his hunger strike for the time being, before a catastrophic event takes place.

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