

12 November 2019

Dear Mr Kerrith Brown,

My name is Hakeem AlAraibi and I am writing on behalf of award winning Brazilian Jiu Jitsu and MMA fighter **Mohamed Mirza**, who is currently serving an unlawful prison sentence in Bahrain's Jau Prison. Just like me, Mohamed is a victim of the Bahraini government's ongoing crackdown on athletes who participated in our country's pro-democracy movement in 2011.

Mohamad, who hails from my village, has represented Bahrain in many tournaments, including the 2008 Asian Open Championship in Thailand, where he came second and third in several categories. The London-based Bahrain Institute for Rights and Democracy reached out to me with a letter from Mohamed in which he shares the account of his arrest, torture and imprisonment by the Bahraini government and raises concerns about your organisation's endorsement of the 2019 Brave International Combat Week. As a sportsperson and victim of Bahrain's repression myself, I decided to raise my voice and personally deliver Mohamed's letter to you. **Kindly find it below.**

Bahrain has a long history of [exploiting](#) major international sporting events to whitewash their dismal human rights record, and we believe the establishment of the Brave Combat Federation by Prince Khaled bin Hamad Al Khalifa to **be consistent with these aims**. Mohamed is appealing to your federation to raise his case with the Bahraini authorities and to reconsider your future partnership with Bahrain.

In 2011, hundreds of thousands of people took to the streets of Bahrain to peacefully demand democratic reforms. Bahrainis from all walks of life, including professional athletes like myself and Mohamad, joined the [protests](#), which we believed would encourage our rulers to introduce positive changes. Instead they brutally crushed the movement and began arresting those involved. As well known, popular figures, athletes were particularly targeted.

I was consequently deeply disappointed to see Prince Nasser bin Hamad Al Khalifa [deliver](#) an opening speech at the launch of BRAVE International Combat Week. This is the same man that, soon after the crushing of the protests, was put in [charge](#) of an investigative committee mandated to identify and punish athletes. On national television, Prince Nasser [threatened](#) *"whoever calls for the fall of the regime, may a wall fall on his head ... whether he is an athlete, socialite or politician, whatever he is, he will be held accountable at this time. Today is judgment day...Bahrain is an island and there is no escape."* In the wake of this statement, over 150 athletes were [arrested](#), and many of us were tortured, jailed and banned from participating in professional sports.

Mohamed paid a harsh price for exercising his rights to peaceful expression and assembly. On 16 March 2011, he and eight others were arrested at a checkpoint. After being tortured into [signing](#) a confession, a military court [sentenced](#) him and the other defendants to 15 years in prison. While the others were later acquitted, Mohamed remains in prison to this day, despite receiving a reduced sentence for unclear

reasons. Since being jailed, Mohamed has launched several [hunger strikes](#) protesting inhumane prison conditions, including the deliberate [denial](#) of medical care to inmates.

I am speaking out on behalf of Mohamed as I also experienced the brutality with which the Bahraini government treats its citizens. As a professional footballer, I represented Bahrain's national team and was arrested, tortured and jailed for participating in the 2011 protests. I was forced to flee to Australia, but despite being a recognised refugee in Australia, this time last year I was detained in Bangkok for over 70 days under an Interpol red notice triggered by Bahrain. The government wanted to extradite me to serve a 10-year sentence for a crime I never committed; I was playing in a televised match at the time the alleged crime took place. I was lucky enough that the international sports community stood up for me; [FIFA](#), [FIFPro](#) and the [International Olympic Committee](#) intervened on my behalf and I was eventually released. I hope you can do the same for Mohamed.

Mohamed is appealing to you, so that you raise his case with the Bahraini authorities. I echo his call for you to distance yourself from the Bahraini government by reconsidering any future partnership which may provide them with the opportunity to rehabilitate their tarnished international image.

Yours Sincerely,

Hakeem AlAraibi

10 November 2019

To the President of the IMMAF Mr Kerrith Brown,

My greetings. As the Brave International Combat Week kicks off, I am sending this letter from Jau Prison, Bahrain, in order to express my frustration at your continued support for activities organised by the Bahraini authorities.

By attempting to showcase Bahrain as the Middle East's sporting capital, the Bahraini authorities are exploiting your support and concealing the truth about their ongoing violations against detained sportspeople. In light of this ongoing support, I declare that I will be abstaining from speaking [to prison authorities] for the duration of the championship (10-16 November), as a message of peaceful protest.

I am just one of many political detainees whom the Bahraini authorities have kept in prison since 2011. I am an MMA fighter and coach and have earned podiums at several championships. Instead of being honoured and embraced as a national talent, I was kidnapped by military forces at a checkpoint on 16 March 2011, during the state of emergency. I was questioned and psychologically and physically tortured over the course of three months.

I was then tried before a military court that fell short of standards of justice and integrity. For 8 years and 7 months I have been denied my freedom. When I complete my sentence, I will have spent 10 years out of the ring because of the authorities' failure to find a political resolution to the current crisis.

I personally call on you to relate my suffering as a sportsperson to the Bahraini authorities and to urge them to respect human rights. I request that you end the support your federation provides to Bahrain, which risks whitewashing the abuses perpetrated against sportspeople detained in Bahraini prisons.

Jiu-Jitsu Fighter and Coach,

Mohammed Mirza

Jau Central Prison