

URGENT ACTION

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDER FACES NEW CHARGES

On 12 September, prisoner of conscience Nabeel Rajab was interrogated by the Terrorism Prosecution in relation to comments posted on Instagram and Twitter accounts running in his name. He faces new charges including “inciting hatred against the regime”. There are also concerns for his safety after he was interrogated by the National Security Agency in June.

On 12 September, the Terrorism Prosecution interrogated prisoner of conscience and human rights defender **Nabeel Rajab** in connection with comments and an image posted on social media accounts running in his name in January 2017. An image of King of Bahrain with a Quranic verse asking whether he believed that “no one had power over him” was posted on an Instagram account in his name while comments on non-cooperation with national institutions and a call to protest against the 15 January execution of three men were posted on his Twitter account. He denied the charges of “incitement to hatred against the regime”, “incitement to non-compliance with the law” and “spreading false news”. The case has yet to be referred to trial and could be activated at any time.

In June 2017, Nabeel Rajab was interrogated by the Bahrain National Security Agency (NSA) whose powers to arrest and to interrogate in cases linked to “terrorist crimes” were restored in January 2017. Due to recent cases of government critics being subjected to torture by the NSA, there are heightened concerns for Nabeel Rajab’s safety.

His trial in relation to comments posted and retweeted on his Twitter account about the war in Yemen and allegations of torture in Jaw prison is ongoing and on 11 September, the High Criminal Court in the Bahrain capital Manama, adjourned to 27 September. If found guilty, Nabeel Rajab faces up to 15 years’ imprisonment. On 10 July, Nabeel Rajab was convicted of “disseminating false news, statements and rumours about the internal situation of the kingdom that would undermine its prestige and status” and sentenced to two years in prison with regard to TV interviews he gave in 2015 and 2016.

Please write immediately in Arabic, English or your own language:

- Calling on the Bahraini authorities to release Nabeel Rajab immediately and unconditionally as he is a prisoner of conscience, detained solely for peacefully exercising his right to freedom of expression;
- Pending his release, ensure that Nabeel Rajab is not subjected to torture or other ill-treatment; has regular access to his family, lawyers of his choice, and adequate medical care;
- Urging them to uphold the right to freedom of expression and repeal laws that criminalize the peaceful exercise of the rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly, including Article 216 of the Penal Code.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 3 NOVEMBER 2017 TO:

King

Shaikh Hamad bin ‘Issa Al Khalifa
Office of His Majesty the King
P.O. Box 555
Rifa’a Palace, al-Manama, Bahrain
Fax: +973 1766 4587

Salutation: Your Majesty

Minister of Interior

Shaikh Rashid bin ‘Abdullah Al Khalifa
Ministry of Interior
P.O. Box 13, al-Manama, Bahrain
Fax: +973 1723 2661
Twitter: @moi_Bahrain

Salutation: Your Excellency

And copies to:

Minister of Justice and Islamic Affairs
Shaikh Khalid bin Ali Al Khalifa
Ministry of Justice and Islamic Affairs
P. O. Box 450, al-Manama, Bahrain
Fax: +973 1753 1284
E-form: <http://www.moj.gov.bh/en/>
Twitter: @Khaled_Bin_Ali

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. His Excellency Shaikh Fawaz bin Mohammed Al Khalifa, Embassy of the Kingdom of Bahrain, 30 Belgrave Square, London, SW1X 8QB, Tel: 0207 201 9170, Fax 020 7201 9183, Email: information@bahrainembassy.co.uk or through the online contact form at <http://www.bahrainembassy.co.uk/> Salutation: Your Excellency

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date. This is the seventeenth update of UA 249/14. Further information: www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde11/6716/2017/en/

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Nabeel Rajab is the President of the Bahrain Centre for Human Rights and a prominent human rights defender. He was arrested at around 5am on 13 June 2016 at his home in the village of Bani Jamra, west of the capital Manama, by 15 policemen in civilian clothing and taken to the Criminal Investigation Directorate (CID). The following day, he was taken to the Public Prosecution Office, accused of “spreading false information and rumours in televised interviews with the aim of discrediting the State”. On 26 June 2016, while in detention, Nabeel Rajab learned that he would stand trial on 12 July 2016 for comments he posted and retweeted on Twitter relating to the war in Yemen and allegations of torture in Jaw prison, charged with “spreading false rumours in time of war”, “insulting public authorities [the Ministry of Interior]” and “insulting a foreign country”. He continues to deny all charges. On 28 December 2016, the court ordered Nabeel Rajab’s release. However, the authorities refused to release him and instead he was immediately re-arrested and taken into custody in relation to the investigation into TV interviews he gave in 2015 and 2016. His trial in relation to these interviews began on 23 January 2017 and concluded on 10 July with his conviction and sentencing to two years in prison.

Nabeel Rajab was held in solitary confinement for over nine months of his detention. After suffering from complications following surgery in early April 2017, he was transferred to the Ministry of Interior hospital in al-Qalaa where he remains. Prolonged and indefinite solitary confinement violates the prohibition of torture and other ill-treatment. Despite medical reports issued by the hospital confirming that he could not attend his hearings, the court went ahead with the hearings for both his trials.

On 4 September 2016, an open letter was printed under Nabeel Rajab’s name in the opinion pages of the New York Times which described the situation in Bahrain and his own trial, and urged the Obama administration to use its leverage to resolve the conflict in Yemen. The next day, the public prosecution interrogated and charged Nabeel Rajab with “spreading false news and statements and malicious rumours that undermine the prestige of the state” in relation to the article. No trial date for this case has yet been set. On 19 December 2016, an article was published in Nabeel Rajab’s name in Le Monde. Two days later, he was interrogated at the CID, accused of “spreading false news and statements and malicious rumours that undermine the prestige of Bahrain and the brotherly countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council, and an attempt to endanger their relations”. The case was referred to the public prosecution but it is unknown if he will be officially charged.

In May 2014 Nabeel Rajab completed a two-year sentence in Jaw prison for taking part in an “illegal gathering”, “disturbing public order” and “calling for and taking part in demonstrations” in Manama, “without prior notification” between January and March 2012. A travel ban was imposed on him in November that year. He also served part of a six-month prison sentence between April and July 2015 for “publicly insulting official institutions”, in relation to two tweets he posted on 28 September 2014 that were considered offensive to the Ministries of Defense and Interior. He was released on 13 July 2015 on medical grounds after he received a royal pardon. His November 2014 travel ban was lifted in August 2015, only for his lawyers to learn that a new one, which remains in place, had been imposed on 13 July 2015.

Since May 2016 the Bahraini authorities have intensified their crackdown on the rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly, association and movement, particularly against the political opposition and those critical of the authorities. For further information, see the report *‘No one can protect you’, Bahrain’s year of crushing dissent* <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde11/6790/2017/en/>. The Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry (BICI), appointed by Royal Order on 29 June 2011, was charged with investigating and reporting on human rights violations committed in connection with the 2011 protests. At the launch of the BICI report in November 2011, the government publicly committed itself to implementing its recommendations.

Further information on UA: 249/14 Index: MDE 11/7136/2017 Issue Date: 22 September 2017