

URGENT ACTION

NABEEL RAJAB'S TRIAL POSTPONED TO 31 OCTOBER

The High Criminal Court has postponed its verdict in the case of Bahraini human rights defender and prisoner of conscience Nabeel Rajab to 31 October. He also faces a new trial in relation to an opinion piece published under his name in the *New York Times* on 4 September.

On 6 October Bahraini prisoner of conscience, **Nabeel Rajab**, appeared before the High Criminal Court in the capital Manama. The court did not issue a verdict and instead rescheduled the hearing for 31 October. No reason was given for the delay. Three days earlier, on 3 October, he had undergone surgery – a cholecystectomy – to remove his gallbladder. Before the hearing his lawyers renewed their request to obtain copies of his medical records to verify claims by the Ministry of Interior and Public Prosecutor that he is receiving all necessary medical treatment. However, his lawyer has not been provided this information by the court.

Nabeel Rajab's trial began on 12 July on charges of "spreading false rumours in time of war", "insulting public authorities [the Ministry of Interior]" and "insulting a foreign country". He has denied all the charges, which stem from comments he posted on Twitter and retweeted relating to the war in Yemen and allegations of torture in Jaw prison after a prison riot in March 2015. If found guilty, he faces up to 15 years' imprisonment. On 1 September he was temporarily released for three days to attend the mourning ceremony of his mother-in-law. On 4 September 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. This charge is to be heard at a separate trial. His travel ban, imposed in November 2014, remains in place.

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;
- Calling on them to lift Nabeel Rajab's travel ban;
- 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 assembly, including Article 216 of the Penal Code.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 22 NOVEMBER 2016 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 (keep trying)

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

Email: info@interior.gov.bh

Salutation: Your Excellency

And copies to:

Minister of Justice and Islamic Affairs

Shaikh Khalid bin Ali bin Abdullah Al Khalifa

Ministry of Justice and Islamic Affairs

P. O. Box 450, al-Manama, Bahrain

Fax: +973 1753 1284

Email:

<http://www.moj.gov.bh/en/default76a7.html?action=category&ID=159>

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 twelfth update of UA 249/14. Further information: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde11/4600/2016/en/>

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The *New York Times* article of 4 September can be accessed online at: http://www.nytimes.com/2016/09/05/opinion/letter-from-a-bahraini-jail.html?_r=0 (accessed 10/10/2016).

Nabeel Rajab is the President of the Bahrain Centre for Human Rights. He has already served 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 the capital, Manama, “without prior notification” between January and March 2012. He had been sentenced to three years in prison on 16 August 2012, which was reduced on appeal to two years in prison on 11 December 2012. He was released in May 2014, but a travel ban was imposed on him in November that year.

On 20 January 2015 he was sentenced to six months in prison for “publicly insulting official institutions” in relation to two tweets he wrote on 28 September 2014 that were considered offensive to the Ministries of Defense and Interior, under Article 216 of Bahrain’s Penal Code. His appeal was rejected on 14 May that year by the High Criminal Court of Appeal. Nabeel Rajab was arrested at his home on 2 April and taken to the Criminal Investigations Directorate (CID) where he was questioned about comments he allegedly tweeted or retweeted about the Yemen war and incidents in Jaw prison after a prison riot on 10 March. The Ministry of Interior said that he had been arrested for posting a “message that could incite people and disrupt peace” and “defaming a statutory body”. He was charged under Articles 216 and 133 of Bahrain’s Penal Code and his detention was renewed several times by the Public Prosecution until 14 May, when he was ordered to serve his six-month sentence. He was released in the evening of 13 July 2015, after a royal pardon was issued for medical reasons. His November 2014 travel ban was lifted in August 2015, only for his lawyers to learn that a new one had been imposed on him on 13 July 2015.

Nabeel Rajab was re-arrested at his home in the village of Bani Jamra, west of the capital Manama, on 13 June 2016 by 15 policemen in civilian clothing after the neighbourhood was surrounded by riot police at about 5am. They showed him a warrant to search his house, for his arrest and for his transfer to the CID, without giving any reason. His phone and computer were confiscated and he was taken to the East Rifa’ police station, south of Manama, from where he was allowed to call his family. On 14 June he was taken to the Public Prosecution Office where he was charged, in the presence of his lawyers, with “spreading false information and rumours with the aim of discrediting the State” and ordered to be detained for seven days pending investigation. When his family visited him at about 9pm, he told them he was being held without meaningful human contact, unlike other detainees in the station who share cells. On 21 June Nabeel Rajab’s detention was extended for another eight days and on 26 June he was notified that he would be facing a new trial before the High Criminal Court on 12 July over the same comments and retweets posted on Twitter in March 2015. He was transferred to West Rifa’ police station on 23 June. After suffering from an irregular heartbeat on 27 June he was taken by ambulance to the Ministry of Interior Hospital in al-Qalaa and then to the Coronary Care Unit at the Bahrain Defense Forces Hospital. A day earlier he had complained to his wife that he had high blood pressure and ringing in his ears. He was returned to prison on 29 June. His new trial began on 12 July and an additional charge of “insulting a foreign country” was levelled against him.

The Bahraini authorities have intensified their crackdown on the rights to freedom of expression, association, assembly and movement. Since 12 June 2016 at least 19 people have been prevented from leaving Bahrain. They include a group of five activists, among them a former prisoner of conscience, who were on their way to attend the UN Human Rights Council’s 32nd session in Geneva. The country’s main opposition group al-Wefaq National Islamic Society was suspended on 14 June and its spiritual leader Ayatollah Isa Qassem stripped of his nationality on 20 June.

Further information on UA: 249/14 Index: MDE 11/4969/2016 Issue Date: 11 October 2016