

URGENT ACTION

CANADIAN SENTENCED AFTER PROTEST

A Canadian national in Bahrain had his five-year prison sentence upheld on appeal on 24 January 2012. He was arrested after taking part in protests in March 2011. Amnesty International calls for the charges against him to be dropped.

Naser Bader al-Raas, a Canadian national of Kuwaiti origin, was arrested at Bahrain International Airport on 20 March 2011 when he was leaving the country. He had arrived on 6 March in the country to visit his sister, who is a resident in Bahrain and had taken part in anti-government protests. After his arrest, his family and friends did not know his whereabouts for one month, during which he was held in solitary confinement. He later claimed he had been subjected to torture and other ill-treatment in detention, including by being beaten with sticks, being forced to stand for long hours and being verbally abused. He was admitted to the Bahrain Defense Force Hospital for a few days due to worsening of his health condition after he was allegedly tortured. On 20 April he was released without further explanation but his passport was confiscated.

On 4 October, Naser Bader al-Raas was found not guilty by the National Safety Court, a military court, of charges including kidnapping and killing a policeman during the anti-government protests. However, he was charged in a separate case together with another 12 defendants, and was sentenced on 25 October by a lower criminal court to five years in prison for inciting hatred towards the regime, participating in illegal gatherings and giving false information to the media. The other defendants were sentenced to between two and four years in prison. Naser Bader al-Raas went into hiding after the verdict was announced.

On 24 January 2012 the High Criminal Court of Appeal acquitted the rest of the group from all charges but upheld the five-year sentence for Naser Bader al-Raas, who was not present in court. His lawyer told Amnesty International that he intends to formally request the court to reconsider the sentence and to acquit Naser in a court session attended by his client.

Amnesty International considers that Naser Bader al-Raas has been sentenced for exercising his right to freedom of expression and assembly, and that if he is sent to prison he would be a prisoner of conscience.

Please write immediately in English or Arabic:

- Urging the Bahraini authorities to immediately drop all charges against Nasser al-Raas since he has been sentenced for exercising his right to freedom of expression and assembly, and highlighting that if he is sent to prison he would be considered a prisoner of conscience;
- Urging the authorities to conduct an immediate investigation into his allegations of torture, make the results public and bring to justice anyone found responsible for his torture or other ill-treatment.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 6 MARCH 2012 TO:

His Majesty the King
 Shaikh Hamad bin 'Issa Al Khalifa
 Office of His Majesty the King
 P.O. Box 555
 Rifa'a Palace, al-Manama, Bahrain
 Fax: +973 176 64 587
Salutation: Your Majesty

Minister of Interior
 Shaikh Rashid bin 'Abdullah bin Ahmad
 Al Khalifa
 Ministry of Interior
 P.O. Box 13, al-Manama,
 Bahrain
 Fax: +973 172 32 661
Salutation: Your Excellency

Minister of Human Rights and Social
 Development
 Dr Fatima bint Mohammed Al Balooshi
 Ministry of Human Rights and Social
 Development
 P.O. Box 32868, Manama, Bahrain
 Fax: +973 171 04 977
 E-mail: pr@social.gov.bh
Salutation: Your Excellency

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country.

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

On 25 October 2011, a lower criminal court, sentenced Naser Bader al-Raas to five years in prison for participating in protests, inciting hatred towards the regime and giving false information to the media. Another 12 defendants were sentenced with him, they include: Issa Ahmed Thani (who was sentenced to four years), Hamid Abbas Abdul Wahab (sentenced to two years), Ali Hassan Al-Sitri (sentenced to three years), Jafar Hassan Al-Sitri (sentenced to three years), Wafi Al-Majed (sentenced to four years), who is the husband of Zainab al-Khawaja, daughter of Abdulhadi al-Khawaja, Abdullah Hassan Al-Saif (sentenced to two years) in absentia, Mohamed Ali Ibrahim (sentenced to three years), Mohammed Hassan (sentenced to four years), Hussain Bu Rashid (sentenced to three years), Hussain Ramadan (sentenced to three years), Hamza Hassan (sentenced to two years), and Abdulwahab Naser (sentenced to two years).

The rest of the defendants were acquitted of all charges on 24 January 2012 and were due to be released on the same day after completing all administrative formalities. All other defendants, except for Naser Bader al-Raas and another one of the men also tried in absentia, are held in Jaw prison. Naser Bader al-Raas was released on bail in April and did not attend the appeal hearing when his sentence was upheld.

Months have passed since scores of people demonstrated at the Pearl Roundabout in February and March. However, many health workers, opposition and human rights activists, teachers and others are still facing trials or are serving prison sentences in Bahrain.

On 23 November, the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry (BICI), established by Royal Decree on 29 June to investigate abuses during the March/February protests and other abuses in the following months, issued its 500 page report. Hundreds of cases of human rights violations were covered in the report, including beatings of protesters by security forces, mass arbitrary arrests of mainly Shi'a opposition activists and widespread torture, with five deaths resulting from torture in custody. At least 46 people have died in connection with the protests, including five security personnel. The report urged the Bahraini government to immediately establish an independent body made up of representatives of civil society, the opposition and the government; to oversee the implementation of the BICI's recommendations; to usher in legislative reforms to ensure laws are in line with international human rights standards; and to bring to account those responsible for abuses.

Name: Naser Bader al-Raas

Gender m/f: Male

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