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## **Bahrain: End prison ordeal for Nabeel Rajab immediately**

Bahrain's authorities must immediately release Nabeel Rajab, a prominent human rights activist jailed for taking part in an anti-government protest last year, said Amnesty International.

Nabeel Rajab, the President of the Bahrain Centre for Human Rights (BCHR), has been detained in Jaw Prison since 9 July 2012. On Friday 29 November he will have served three quarters of his two year sentence and will become legally eligible for release.

"A failure to release Nabeel Rajab on Friday would make it crystal clear that his imprisonment is not about justice or the law but about silencing him," said Hassiba Hadj Sahraoui, Deputy Director for the Middle East and North Africa.

"Nabeel Rajab should never have been imprisoned in the first place. As a human rights defender he should be allowed to carry out his work free from intimidation or threat of reprisal. His arrest, detention and trial demonstrate the brazen disregard the Bahraini authorities have displayed for human rights and freedom of expression."

Amnesty International considers Nabeel Rajab a prisoner of conscience.

Nabeel Rajab was sentenced to three years in prison in August 2012 for calling for and participating in "illegal gatherings" and "disturbing public order" between February and March last year. His sentence was reduced to two years in prison on appeal.

An Amnesty International trial observer, who attended his hearing on 10 September, reported that Nabeel Rajab had told the court that he had been held in dire conditions and was subjected to ill-treatment. He described being placed in solitary confinement in a cell with a dead animal. He also said that he was held almost naked, with only a small piece of cloth covering his genitals.

"Not only has Nabeel Rajab been unfairly detained for more than a year but he has also been held in inhumane and humiliating conditions," said Hassiba Hadj Sahraoui.

"His detention for taking part in a peaceful protest shows the lengths to which Bahrain's authorities will go to stamp out dissent. His case also shows how, despite repeated promises of reform, Bahrain continues to flout its international human rights obligations."

Bahrain's authorities have repeatedly used legislation to punish peaceful protesters taking part in unauthorized gatherings. Under the country's penal code, gatherings of more than five people can be criminalized if those assembled were deemed to do so with the intention to commit a crime or any acts aimed at undermining public security.

Nabeel Rajab was repeatedly detained and persecuted by the authorities even before his arrest. In February 2012 he was punched in the face several times by riot police as he led a demonstration.

He was also arrested after returning from a human rights workshop in Lebanon in May 2012 and charged with “insulting a national institution” (the Ministry of Interior) in his tweets. Two months later he was sentenced to three months in prison for different comments he made on Twitter about Bahrain’s Prime Minister. His conviction on this charge was overturned, but only after he had already served his three month sentence.

#### Background information

Two years after the report of the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry (BICI), which was charged with investigating human rights violations committed in connection with the 2011 protests in Bahrain, the government has not implemented the report’s key recommendations.

Prisoners of conscience remain behind bars and the rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly continue to be suppressed. For further information see the report Reform shelved, repression unleashed (Index: MDE 11/062/2012), November 2012, <http://amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE11/062/2012/en>.

In July 2013, Bahrain’s King, Shaikh Hamad Bin ‘Issa Al Khalifa issued several decrees toughening punishments laid out in the 2006 anti-terrorism law and further curtailing the right to freedom of assembly. These include banning all protests, sit-ins and public gatherings in Manama indefinitely and giving the security forces additional powers.