

URGENT ACTION

PRISONER OF CONSCIENCE ON TRIAL FACES NEW CHARGES

Prisoner of conscience Nabeel Rajab remains on trial for comments posted on Twitter. The verdict pursuant to his trial has been repeatedly postponed since October 2016. He also faces a new trial on separate charges related to TV interviews he gave. He faces up to 18 years in prison if convicted in both cases.

Prominent human rights defender and prisoner of conscience **Nabeel Rajab** appeared before the High Criminal Court, in the capital Manama, on 22 February in relation to comments he posted and retweeted on Twitter. The comments in question related to the war in Yemen and allegations of torture in Jaw prison after a prison riot broke out in March 2015. During the hearing, the court played video footage, brought by a Criminal Investigations Directorate (CID) officer, who testified during the last hearing held the previous day that the footage showed Nabeel Rajab admit to being the author of the tweets in question. The trial is set to resume on 22 March.

On 28 December 2016, during a hearing on the tweet charges, 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 another investigation into TV interviews he gave in 2015 and 2016. The Public Prosecution charged him with "spreading false news in media interviews", the trial for which began on 23 January. On 21 February, he appeared before the Lower Criminal Court for the third hearing. Requests by his lawyers for him to be released were denied. The next hearing was scheduled for 7 March. If convicted in both cases, he could face up to 18 years in prison. He continues to be held in West Rifa police station, south-west of Manama.

Nabeel Rajab is also facing separate charges in relation to two pieces written in his name in the *New York Times* in September 2016 and *Le Monde* in December 2016. The travel ban he has been under since November 2014 also remains in place.

Please write immediately in English, Arabic 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.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 7 APRIL 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 (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

Twitter: @moi_Bahrain

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

Twitter: @Khaled_Bin_Ali

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Please insert local diplomatic addresses below:

Name Address 1 Address 2 Address 3 Fax Fax number Email Email address Salutation Salutation

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date. This is the fourteenth update of UA 249/14. Further information:

www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde11/5085/2016/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.

Nabeel Rajab's trial on charges of "spreading false rumours in time of war", "insulting public authorities [the Ministry of Interior]" and "insulting a foreign country", in relation to comments he posted and retweeted on Twitter relating to the war in Yemen and allegations of torture in Jaw prison, began on 12 July 2016. The court was due to give its verdict on 6 October 2016 but it has been postponed several times since. He continues to deny all charges. At around 5am on 13 June 2016, Nabeel Rajab was re-arrested at his home in the village of Bani Jamra, west of the capital Manama, by 15 policemen in civilian clothing after the neighbourhood was surrounded by riot police. Without offering an explanation, they presented him with an arrest warrant, a search warrant for his house, and a warrant for his transfer to the CID. On 14 June 2016, 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" and detained for seven days pending investigation. On 21 June 2016, his detention was extended a further seven days. While in detention, on 26 June 2016, Nabeel Rajab learnt that he would stand trial on 12 July 2016 for comments he posted on Twitter. He was not charged for the TV interviews he gave until 28 December 2016, the trial for which began on 23 January 2017.

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. A trial date for this charge has yet to be set. On 19 December 2016, an article was published in Nabeel Rajab's name in *Le Monde*. Two days later, Nabeel Rajab was interrogated at the Criminal Investigations Directorate (CID), accused of "spreading false news and statements and malicious rumours that undermine the prestige of Bahrain and the brotherly countries of the GCC, and an attempt to endanger their relations". The case was referred to the Public Prosecution.

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", under Article 216 of Bahrain's Penal Code, 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.

Name: Nabeel Rajab
Gender m/f: m

Further information on UA: 249/14 Index: MDE 11/5776/2017 Issue Date: 24 February 2017