

URGENT ACTION

GROWING HEALTH CONCERNS FOR PROMINENT ACTIVIST

Prisoner of conscience Nabeel Rajab has been held in solitary confinement for nine months, with growing concerns about the effect it is having on his health and well-being. On 22 March, his trial in the case regarding comments he posted on Twitter was once again postponed and re-scheduled for 17 May. He also remains on trial on separate charges in relation to TV interviews he gave in 2015 and 2016.

On 22 March, **Nabeel Rajab's** trial before Bahrain's High Criminal Court in the capital, Manama, was adjourned to 17 May. The verdict has been postponed numerous times since October 2016, when the court was originally expected to deliver its verdict. Nabeel Rajab is being tried in relation to comments posted and retweeted on his Twitter account relating to the war in Yemen and allegations of torture in Jaw prison after a prison riot broke out in March 2015. If found guilty, he faces up to 15 years' imprisonment. He is a prisoner of conscience.

Nabeel Rajab has been held in solitary confinement since his arrest in June 2016, in West Rifa police station, south-west of Manama. He continues to suffer from ill-health. He has had several medical problems including irregular heartbeat (arrhythmia) and other issues. Amnesty International is concerned about the effect his solitary confinement is having on his health and well-being. For over nine months the neighbouring cells have been deliberately kept empty so as to ensure he is utterly deprived of human interaction. Such prolonged solitary confinement amounts to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment and may amount to torture.

Nabeel Rajab is also on trial in a separate case in relation to TV interviews he gave in 2015 and 2016, the fourth hearing for which took place on 7 March. Requests by his lawyers for him to be released were denied. The next hearing is to take place on 3 May. If convicted, he could face an additional three years in prison.

Nabeel Rajab is also facing another two sets of charges in relation to two pieces written in his name in the New York Times in September 2016 and Le Monde in December 2016. His July 2015 travel ban 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, pending release, immediately end Nabeel Rajab's solitary confinement and ensure he is held in humane conditions;
- 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 5 MAY 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 fifteenth update of UA 249/14. Further information:

www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde11/5776/2017/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.

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. He continues to deny all charges. At around 5am on 13 June 2016, Nabeel Rajab was arrested 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". He was detained for 15 days. On 26 June 2016, while in detention, Nabeel Rajab learned that he would stand trial on 12 July 2016 for comments he posted on Twitter.

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 the 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 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, 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.

Name: Nabeel Rajab
Gender m/f: m

Further information on UA: 249/14 Index: 11/5953/2017 Issue Date: 24 March 2017