



## AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT

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### Bahrain: ‘Call for Nabeel Rajab’s release’, rights groups urge 50 governments

15 September 2016 – Rights groups yesterday wrote to the governments of 50 states urging them to publicly call for the release of Bahraini human rights defender Nabeel Rajab, who faces up to 15 years’ imprisonment for comments he made on Twitter. Last week, Bahrain brought the new charge of “defaming the state” against him, after an op-ed was [published under his name](#) in *The New York Times*.

The letter from 22 NGOs, including Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, urges the 50 governments to “speak out on Bahrain’s continued misuse of the judicial system to harass and silence human rights defenders, through charges that violate freedom of expression.”

Among those addressed are the governments of France, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States. While the US State Department [called for Nabeel Rajab’s release on 6 September](#), other governments have not done so. The 50 states addressed in the letter are all previous signatories of statements at the United Nations criticizing Bahrain’s ongoing human rights violations and calling for progress.

The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Prince Zeid bin Ra’ad Al-Husseini, used his [opening statement](#) at the 33rd Human Rights Council this week to raise concern over Bahrain’s harassing and arresting human rights defenders. He cautioned Bahrain: “The past decade has demonstrated repeatedly and with punishing clarity exactly how disastrous the outcomes can be when a government attempts to smash the voices of its people, instead of serving them.”

Nabeel Rajab, the President of the Bahrain Center for Human Rights, has been held in pre-trial detention since 13 June. During this time he has been held largely in solitary confinement, and his health has deteriorated as a result. Since 2011, Nabeel Rajab has faced multiple prosecutions and prison sentences for his vocal activism. He was subjected to a travel ban in 2014 and has been unable to leave the country.

In his current trial, Nabeel Rajab faces charges including “insulting a statutory body”, “insulting a neighbouring country”, and “disseminating false rumours in time of war”. These are in relation to remarks he tweeted and retweeted on Twitter in 2015 relating to torture in Bahrain’s Jaw prison and the role of the Saudi Arabian-led coalition in causing a humanitarian crisis in Yemen.

Nabeel Rajab's next court session has been set for 6 October, when he is expected to be sentenced.

### **Background**

NGOs and others have been urging action on Nabeel Rajab's case since he was [imprisoned in pre-trial detention in June](#). The Bahrain Institute for Rights and Democracy wrote to British Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson on 7 September urging public action on Nabeel Rajab. On 2 September, 34 NGOs wrote a [letter](#) to the King of Bahrain calling for Nabeel Rajab's release.

In August, as part of an initiative organised by Index on Censorship, leading writers wrote a [letter](#) to British Prime Minister Theresa May asking the UK government to call on Bahrain, their ally, to release Nabeel Rajab. They included playwright David Hare, author Monica Ali, comedian Shazia Mirza, MP Keir Starmer and Nobel laureate Wole Soyinka.