URGENT ACTION

FURTHER PROBES ORDERED INTO NABEEL RAJAB'S CASE

Bahraini human rights defender and prisoner of conscience Nabeel Rajab's verdict has been postponed once again. The High Criminal Court has scheduled the next hearing for 15 December to allow further investigations into his Twitter account.

On 31 October **Nabeel Rajab** appeared before the High Criminal Court in the capital Manama. The court did not issue a verdict and instead rescheduled the hearing for 15 December to allow a court-appointed cybercrimes expert to further investigate his Twitter account. The French, Italian, Spanish, UK and US embassies sent representatives to observe the trial session. He continues to be held in West Rifa' police Station, south-west of Manama.

Nabeel Rajab's trial began on 12 July on charges of "spreading false rumours in time of war", "insulting public authorities [the Ministry of Interior]" and "insulting a foreign country". He has denied all the charges, which stem from comments he posted on Twitter and retweeted relating to the war in Yemen and allegations of torture in Jaw prison after a prison riot in March 2015. If found guilty, he faces up to 15 years' imprisonment. On 4 September 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. This charge is to be heard at a separate trial. His travel ban, imposed in November 2014, remains in place.

Please write immediately in Arabic, English 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, including Article 216 of the Penal Code.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 13 DECEMBER 2016 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
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
Email: http://www.moj.gov.bh/en/default76a7.html?action=category&ID=159
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 thirteenth update of UA 249/14. Further information: www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde11/4969/2016/en/

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The *New York Times* article of 4 September can be accessed online at: http://www.nytimes.com/2016/09/05/opinion/letter-from-a-bahraini-jail.html?_r=0 (accessed 10/10/2016).

Nabeel Rajab is the President of the Bahrain Centre for Human Rights. He has already served 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 the capital, Manama, "without prior notification" between January and March 2012. He had been sentenced to three years in prison on 16 August 2012, which was reduced on appeal to two years in prison on 11 December 2012. He was released in May 2014, but a travel ban was imposed on him in November that year.

On 20 January 2015 he was sentenced to six months in prison for "publicly insulting official institutions" in relation to two tweets he wrote on 28 September 2014 that were considered offensive to the Ministries of Defense and Interior, under Article 216 of Bahrain's Penal Code. His appeal was rejected on 14 May that year by the High Criminal Court of Appeal and his six month prison sentence upheld. Nabeel Rajab was arrested at his home on 2 April and taken to the Criminal Investigations Directorate (CID) where he was questioned about comments he allegedly tweeted or retweeted about the Yemen war and incidents in Jaw prison after a prison riot on 10 March. The Ministry of Interior said that he had been arrested for posting a "message that could incite people and disrupt peace" and "defaming a statutory body". He was charged under Articles 216 and 133 of Bahrain's Penal Code. He was released in the evening of 13 July 2015, after a royal pardon was issued for medical reasons. His November 2014 travel ban was lifted in August 2015, only for his lawyers to learn that a new one had been imposed on him on 13 July 2015. It remains in place to this day.

Nabeel Rajab was re-arrested at his home in the village of Bani Jamra, west of the capital Manama, on 13 June 2016 by 15 policemen in civilian clothing after the neighbourhood was surrounded by riot police at about 5am. They showed him a warrant to search his house, for his arrest and for his transfer to the CID, without giving any reason. His phone and computer were confiscated and he was taken to the East Rifa' police station, south of Manama, from where he was allowed to call his family. On 14 June he was taken to the Public Prosecution Office where he was charged, in the presence of his lawyers, with "spreading false information and rumours with the aim of discrediting the State" and ordered to be detained for seven days pending investigation. When his family visited him at about 9pm, he told them he was being held without meaningful human contact, unlike other detainees in the station who share cells. On 21 June Nabeel Rajab's detention was extended for another eight days and on 26 June he was notified that he would be facing a new trial before the High Criminal Court on 12 July over the same comments and retweets posted on Twitter in March 2015. He was transferred to West Rifa' police station on 23 June. After suffering from an irregular heartbeat on 27 June he was taken by ambulance to the Ministry of Interior Hospital in al-Qalaa and then to the Coronary Care Unit at the Bahrain Defense Forces Hospital. A day earlier he had complained to his wife that he had high blood pressure and ringing in his ears. He was returned to prison on 29 June. His new trial began on 12 July and an additional charge of "insulting a foreign country" was levelled against him.

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. On 14 June al-Wefaq National Islamic Society was suspended and, on 20 June, its spiritual leader, Sheikh Isa Qasem, was stripped of his nationality. Travel bans were imposed including on five activists, among them human rights defenders, who were prevented from leaving Bahrain to attend the June session of the UN Human Rights Council.

Name: Nabeel Rajab
Gender m/f: m

Further information on UA: 249/14 Index: MDE 11/5085/2016 Issue Date: 1 November 2016