

URGENT ACTION

HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVIST RELEASED ON BAIL

Prominent human rights activist Nabeel Rajab was released on bail on 28 May. However, he still has three cases against him relating to his activism and has to go back to court for hearings on 17 and 24 June. He is also banned from travelling abroad.

On 28 May, a lower criminal court in Manama, Bahrain's capital, ordered the release of **Nabeel Rajab** on bail of 300 Bahraini dinars (around US\$800) when he appeared before the court in relation to two separate cases against him. In one case he is charged with calling on people to join him in illegal marches and in the other with participating in an "illegal gathering" and "disturbing public order", charges which his lawyers learnt about only several days ago. The next court hearing in these two cases has been set for 17 June.

On 20 May, Nabeel Rajab had been granted bail in connection with a third case in which he was charged with "insulting a national institution" on Twitter, but he remained in detention, despite paying the bail money, until bail was granted in relation to the other two cases. The next court hearing in the third case is scheduled for 24 June.

On his way home following his release from detention, Nabeel Rajab told Amnesty International: "I am targeted for exercising my right to freedom of expression and assembly, as well as for being a human rights defender. This is not new and this is the price one has to pay for defending human rights. I have full appreciation for all the people who stood up for me. Every letter has made a difference and without the support of activists I would not have been released. Every word activists write has a positive impact. I am released today thanks to you and other organizations who worked on the case, so many thanks to all for this."

Nabeel Rajab is the President of the Bahrain Centre for Human Rights and the Director of the Gulf Centre for Human Rights. He has been targeted previously for his pro-democracy and human rights work, alongside other activists who have called for peaceful anti-government protests in recent months.

Please write immediately in Arabic, English or your own language:

- Welcoming the release on bail of Nabeel Rajab;
- Calling on the Bahraini authorities to drop all the charges against Nabeel Rajab since they are related to him legitimately exercising his rights to freedom of expression and assembly;
- Calling for an investigation to be opened into reports that he was beaten during a protest in February 2012 and for anyone found responsible for abuses in this regard to be brought to justice promptly and fairly.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 10 JULY 2012 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
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
Twitter: @moi_Bahrain
Salutation: Your Excellency

And copies to:

Public Prosecutor
Mr 'Ali al-Bu'ainein
Public Prosecution Office
P.O. Box 450, al-Manama,
Bahrain
Fax: +973 1753 0884
Salutation: Dear Mr 'Ali al-Bu'ainein

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country.

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

This is the second update of UA 128/12. Further information: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE11/029/2012/en>

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Nabeel Rajab organized a protest calling for the release of political prisoners on 6 February 2012. During the protest, he was attacked by riot police who punched him several times in the face, head and back. He said: "I fell on the ground but they continued to beat me – they even stamped on me and kicked me."

On 26 April Nabeel Rajab received a summons for questioning by the Public Prosecutor's Office in connection with a complaint made against him by the Ministry of Interior. He did not go because he was about to travel abroad. He was arrested on 5 May at Manama airport upon his return to Bahrain. Nabeel Rajab was charged with "insulting a national institution" (the Ministry of Interior) in his tweets. He told the prosecutor that all tweets published in his account were his own, but he refused to answer other questions. On 16 May, he appeared before a lower criminal court in Manama and reportedly told the court that the charge was vindictive, explaining that the decision to arrest and try him was political. He reportedly said: "I only practised my right to free expression. I did not commit a crime. The decision to arrest me and put me on trial was a political decision."

The Bahraini authorities have been vocal about their intention to introduce reforms and learn lessons from events in February and March 2011, when the authorities cracked down on anti-government protesters. In November 2011, the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry (BICI) set up by Shaikh Hamad bin 'Issa Al Khalifa, the Bahraini King, submitted a report of its investigation into human rights violations committed in connection with the anti-government protests. The report concluded that the authorities had committed gross human rights violations with impunity, including excessive use of force against protesters, widespread torture and other ill-treatment of protesters, unfair trials and unlawful killings. The report also urged the government to immediately establish an independent body made up of representatives of civil society, the opposition and the government; to oversee the implementation of the BICI's recommendations; to usher in legislative reforms to ensure laws are in line with international human rights standards; to bring to account those responsible for abuses; to release all prisoners of conscience and to conduct investigations into allegations of torture.

So far, however, the government's response has only scratched the surface of these issues. Reforms have been piecemeal, perhaps aiming to appease Bahrain's international partners, and have failed to provide real accountability and justice for the victims. Despite the authorities' claims to the contrary, abuses continue to be committed against those who oppose the Al Khalifa family's rule. The government is refusing to release scores of prisoners who are incarcerated because they called for meaningful political reforms, and is failing to address the Shi'a majority's deeply seated sense of discrimination and political marginalization, which has exacerbated sectarian divisions in the country.

Name: Nabeel Rajab
Gender m/f: Male

Further information on UA: 128/12 Index: MDE 11/036/2012 Issue Date: 29 May 2012