

URGENT ACTION

BAHRAINI ACTIVIST REMAINS IN PRISON

Prominent Bahraini human rights activist, Nabeel Rajab, was acquitted of the charge of libel by the Appeals Court in Manama on 23 August 2012. He remains in prison serving a three-year prison sentence for taking part in anti-government protests. He is a prisoner of conscience.

On 23 August the Appeals Court in Manama, the capital of Bahrain, acquitted **Nabeel Rajab** after he had been sentenced to three months in prison for libel on 9 July. He had been charged with libel after he was accused of “publicly vilifying the people of al-Muharraq and questioning their patriotism with disgraceful expressions posted via social networking websites”. Nabeel Rajab had also been sentenced the week before to a three-year prison sentence for taking part in anti-government protests. During his appeal hearing yesterday in the libel case, Nabeel Rajab told the court he had been subjected to ill-treatment and described his poor prison conditions. He also told his lawyer that following a recent phone call to his wife, in which he had told her of the bad prison conditions, he was put in a smaller, dark cell in solitary confinement for one day.

Nabeel Rajab remains in al-Jaw prison serving a three-year imprisonment sentence following his conviction on 16 August 2012 on charges of “illegal gathering” and “disturbing public order” for calling for and taking part in demonstrations in Manama without prior notification on 12 January, 6 February and 31 March 2012. His lawyers have lodged an appeal and the first appeal hearing has been scheduled for 10 September. The first appeal hearing into the case of “insulting a national institution” in his tweets is due to be heard on 17 November.

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

- Urging the Bahraini authorities to release Nabeel Rajab immediately and unconditionally, as he is detained solely for peacefully exercising his rights to freedom of expression and assembly and as such is a prisoner of conscience;
- Calling on them to quash his convictions and sentences and to drop any remaining charges Nabeel Rajab faces;
- Urging them to protect him from torture or other ill-treatment and to order an investigation into reports that Nabeel Rajab has been ill-treated in detention, and bring anyone found responsible to justice.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 5 OCTOBER 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:

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
Salutation: Your Excellency

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 seventh update of UA 128/12. Further information:

<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE11/051/2012/en>

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The President of the Bahrain Centre for Human Rights and Director of the Gulf Centre for Human Rights, Nabeel Rajab, organized a protest in Manama calling for the release of political prisoners on 6 February 2012. During the protest, he was assaulted 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 2012 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 arrival at Manama airport on 5 May 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 apparently told the court that the charge was vindictive, explaining that the decision to arrest and try him was political: "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." He was released on bail on 27 May.

On 6 June he was arrested again in connection with an investigation into a complaint lodged against him by several people from the northern area of al-Muharraq in relation to another tweet, and was charged with libel on 14 June. He was released on bail from al-Hooraa prison on 27 June.

He was arrested again on 9 July, at his home after the Lower Criminal Court had convicted him of libel that day for a tweet about the visit of the Bahrain's Prime Minister to al-Muharraq, and sentenced him to three months' imprisonment.

The Bahraini authorities have publicly stated their intention to introduce reforms and learn lessons from events in February and March 2011, when they cracked down on anti-government protesters. In November 2011, the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry (BICI), set up by the king, Shaikh Hamad bin 'Issa Al Khalifa, 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 establish immediately 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.

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.

Nabeel Rajab's latest conviction and sentence starkly contradict the facade of reform showcased by the Bahraini authorities.

Name: Nabeel Rajab
Gender m/f: m

Further information on UA: 128/12 Index: MDE 11/052/2012 Issue Date: 24 August 2012