

PRESS RELEASE - THE OBSERVATORY

BAHRAIN: The verdict on Nabeel Rajab's trial expected on October 29

Paris-Geneva, October 21, 2014 – *The Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, a joint programme of the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) and the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT), deplors the Third Lower Criminal Court's refusal to release Nabeel Rajab, FIDH Deputy Secretary General, President of the Bahrain Centre for Human Rights (BCHR), and Director of the Gulf Centre for Human Rights (GCHR). Mr. Nabeel Rajab has been arbitrarily detained since October 1.*

On October 19, 2014, the Third Lower Criminal Court started the trial against Mr. **Nabeel Rajab** on a charge of “insulting a public institution” via Twitter, pursuant to Article 216 of the Bahraini Penal Code, an offence punishable by up to three years of imprisonment. The charges concern various tweets posted on Nabeel Rajab's account, which the Public Prosecution has deemed as insulting to the Ministry of Interior and the Bahraini Defence Forces.

During the hearing, Mr. Rajab denied the accusation, arguing that the tweets did not contain any insult but a warning against the dangers of extremism. He added that online posts were protected under his right to freedom of expression. Considering Mr. Rajab's declaration as a confession of a recidivist's guilt, the prosecution requested the maximum punishment. Mr. Rajab's lawyers complained their client's right of defence has been violated.

Finally the court rejected the request for Mr. Nabeel Rajab's release and adjourned the announcement of the verdict to October 29.

The Observatory recalls that Mr. Rajab had just returned to Bahrain following an international advocacy tour at the United Nations and the European Union, and there are strong reasons to believe that he has been targeted in particular due to his advocacy for human rights violations committed in his country in violation of international human rights standards.

The Observatory will send a trial observation mission to the hearing on October 29 and counts on the full cooperation of the Bahraini authorities. More generally, it calls on the authorities to facilitate access to the country for international trial observers by guaranteeing the automatic issuance of visas and to comply with its human rights obligations, by ensuring that human rights defenders are not subjected to judicial harassment and that their right to a fair trial is fully respected.

For more information, please contact:

- **FIDH: Arthur Manet/Audrey Couprie: + 33 (0) 1 43 55 25 18**
- **OMCT: Miguel Martin Zumalacarregui: +41 22 809 49 24**