

PRESS RELEASE - THE OBSERVATORY

BAHRAIN: New trial against Nabeel Rajab to start on October 19

Paris-Geneva, October 17, 2014 – Human rights defender Nabeel Rajab, President of the Bahrain Centre for Human Rights (BCHR), Director of the Gulf Centre for Human Rights (GCHR) and FIDH Deputy Secretary General, will face a new trial on October 19. 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), along with numerous institutions and NGOs have called for his release and the end of his judicial harassment. In addition, the Observatory urges the authorities of Bahrain to facilitate the access of international human rights experts to the country for trial observation and release .

On October 19, 2014, the Third Lower Criminal Court will open the trial against Mr. **Nabeel Rajab** on charge of “insulting a public institution” via Twitter. The alleged offence concern tweets he published on Twitter, which the CID deemed insulting to the Ministry of Interior, pursuant to Article 216 of the Bahraini Penal Code, punishable by up to three years of imprisonment. Mr. Rajab has been detained since the date of his summons for interrogation on October 1.

Mr. Rajab had just returned to Bahrain following an international advocacy tour at the United Nations and 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.

Mr. Rajab had recently been released from prison after completing a two year sentence (see background information). In another case, he had already been tried on similar charges in relation to tweets deemed to be insulting to the Ministry of Interior, before being acquitted.

In 2013, the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention (UN WGAD) had found that Mr. Rajab's detention was arbitrary, following a previous conviction related to his freedom of opinion, expression and assembly. The UN WGAD had concluded that the “domestic laws of Bahrain (...) seem to deny persons the basic right to freedom of opinion, expression”.

Such ongoing judicial harassment and arbitrary detention is one more evidence of the continued criminalisation of human rights defenders' activities. This particular case has drawn the attention of many institutions, NGOs and third countries. The Observatory intended to send a trial observation mission for the October 19 hearing, but could not get a response in time from the authorities to guarantee its trial observer an unhindered access to the country. Thus, the Observatory calls on the authorities to facilitate the access to the country for international trial observers by guaranteeing the automatic issue of visas.

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