

PRESS RELEASE - THE OBSERVATORY

Bahrain: Release of Nabeel Rajab must be followed by other measures to put an end to the crackdown on human rights defenders

Paris-Geneva, July 14, 2015. *The Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders welcomes the release of Mr. Nabeel Rajab but recalls that it is a positive but insufficient step since the Royal Pardon only concerns one of the three set of criminal charges Mr. Rajab has been facing in the last months.*

Yesterday, King of Bahrain Hamad Ben Issa Al-Khalifa ordered through Royal Pardon the release of Mr. Nabeel Rajab for health reasons. Mr. Rajab had already served three of the six months jail sentence he received in appeal on May 14, 2015, for a tweet (under the charges of "Defamation of a statutory body" under Article 216 of the Penal Code).

However, Mr. Rajab still faces up to fifteen years of imprisonment under several charges all related to tweets: "disseminating false rumours in time of war" (Article 133 of the Penal Code, entailing up to ten years of imprisonment); "disseminating false news causing damage to public security" (Article 168, up to two year); "insulting public authorities" (Article 216, three year).

"These pending investigations represent a Damocles sword which the Bahrain authorities can use at their will to neutralise the human rights activities of Mr. Rajab", said FIDH President Mr. Karim Lahidji.

"While the release of Mr. Nabeel Rajab is a positive step, he should never have been prosecuted nor jailed for his legitimate human rights activities. Moreover, the fact that this release is not unconditional should be deplored", declared OMCT Secretary General Mr. Gerald Staberock.

In addition Mr. Nabeel Rajab's release also takes place in a context of systematic repression of human rights defenders, and just a day after the new arrest of a prominent political figure who had previously been released on Royal Pardon¹, thus attesting that the repression of peaceful dissent by human rights defenders, political and religious figures will continue to be the norm for the Bahraini authorities.

The Observatory calls on the Bahrain authorities to end its policy of arbitrary arrests and release all human rights defenders in jail². This arbitrariness and the continued harassment they face undermines the confidence the international community has in the good faith of the authorities in implementing their human rights commitments and in undertaking genuine and effective reforms.

The Observatory calls on the Bahrain authorities to act upon the requests made by the international community, including the European Parliament's request for "the dropping of charges and immediate and unconditional release of all human rights defenders, political

¹ Ibrahim Sharif, former General Secretary of the National Democratic Action Society (Wa'ad).

² See the Observatory Report, "Imprisonment, torture and statelessness: The darkening reality of human rights defenders in Bahrain", June 25, 2015, [https://www.fidh.org/International-Federation-for-Human-Rights/north-africa-middle-east/bahrain/imprisonment-torture-and-statelessness-the-darkening-reality-of-human](https://www.fidh.org/International-Federation-for-Human-Rights/north-africa-middle-east/bahrain/imprisonment-torture-and-statelessness-the-darkening-reality-of-human-rights-defenders/reports-and-publications/bahrain/2015/06/d23217/) and <http://www.omct.org/human-rights-defenders/reports-and-publications/bahrain/2015/06/d23217/>.

activists and other individuals detained and charged with alleged violations related to the rights of expression, peaceful assembly and association”³.

The Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders (OBS) was created in 1997 by FIDH and OMCT. The objective of this programme is to intervene to prevent or remedy to situations of repression against human rights defenders.

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³ See European Parliament Resolution of July 9, 2015 on Bahrain, in particular the case of Nabeel Rajab (2015/2758(RSP)), <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//NONSGML+TA+P8-TA-2015-0279+0+DOC+PDF+V0//EN>