

THE OBSERVATORY - PRESS RELEASE

BAHRAIN: Nabeel Rajab's trial to resume after nine postponements

Paris-Geneva, February 20, 2017 – Nabeel Rajab is being prosecuted for exercising his right to freedom of expression and denouncing human rights violations perpetrated by the Bahraini authorities. His arbitrary detention and judicial harassment must end now, the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders (an FIDH-OMCT partnership) says today.

On February 21, 2017, Mr. **Nabeel Rajab** will face a series of charges, including “deliberately spreading false information and malicious rumours with the aim of discrediting the State”, “disseminating false rumours in time of war”, “insulting a statutory body” and “offending a foreign country [Saudi Arabia]” before Manama’s Fourth High Criminal Court following the court’s decision on January 23, 2017 to postpone the hearing for the ninth time. Conviction would expose Nabeel Rajab to up to fifteen years in prison.

On the same day, he will face additional charges of “spreading false information and malicious rumors about domestic matters with the aim of discrediting and adversely affecting the State prestige” in a separate case related to three televised interviews made in 2015 and 2016. This will be the third hearing of a case for which he faces up to three years in prison.

“It is crystal clear that Bahraini authorities want to silence Nabeel Rajab by keeping him in jail. But you cannot pass over in silence human rights violations, we will continue to stand in solidarity with Nabeel Rajab until he is unconditionally released”, said Mohamed Zarea, FIDH Vice President.

Nabeel Rajab, co-founder and President of the Bahrain Center for Human Rights (BCHR), Founding Director of the Gulf Center for Human Rights (GCHR), Deputy Secretary General of FIDH from 2012 to 2016, and a member of the Middle East advisory committee at Human Rights Watch, has been one of the country’s most vocal human rights defenders, denouncing human rights violations within the country’s Jaw prison, and denouncing Bahrain’s participation to the bombings of the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen¹.

Nabeel Rajab also faces prosecution following the publication on September 5, 2016 of an Op-Ed in *The New York Times* with his by-line, which discussed the conditions of his imprisonment and arrest. The pending charge of “intentionally broadcasting false news and malicious rumours abroad impairing the prestige of the State” carries an additional one-year prison term in case of conviction. On December 21, 2016, Rajab was interrogated in connection with a letter published in his name in the French newspaper *Le Monde* two days before, which urged Paris and Berlin to “reassess their relationship with [members of the Gulf Cooperation Council], which actively work against democracy and human rights and fan the flames of violence and extremism.”

Arbitrarily detained since June 13, 2016, Nabeel Rajab was temporary released on December 28, 2016 and immediately re-arrested and referred to the Public Prosecution in relation to the investigation, which started in mid-June 2016², over the three televised interviews made in 2015 and 2016. He is now facing up to 18 years in jail.

“Nabeel Rajab’s detention and judicial harassment are outrageous. No evidence of his wrongdoing has been brought before the courts, exposing the authorities’ relentless harassment against him”, concluded Gerald Staberock, OMCT Secretary General.

1

See The Observatory Urgent Appeal BHR 006 / 0812 / OBS 048.27 published on January 9, 2017.

2

See The Observatory Press Release published on December 30, 2016.



The Observatory
for the Protection
of Human Rights Defenders

The Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders (the Observatory) was created in 1997 by FIDH and the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT). The objective of this programme is to prevent or remedy situations of repression against human rights defenders. FIDH and OMCT are both members of ProtectDefenders.eu, the European Union Human Rights Defenders Mechanism implemented by international civil society.

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