

The Prime Minister
10 Downing Street
London
SW1A 2AA

cc. The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, King Charles St, London SW1A 2AH

14 December 2016

Dear Prime Minister,

Unfair trial of Nabeel Rajab in Bahrain

The undersigned organisations are writing to you to urge the Government of the United Kingdom to urgently call publicly and privately on the government of Bahrain to release human rights defender Nabeel Rajab, immediately and unconditionally and drop the charges against him, as they relate solely to his peaceful exercise of his right to freedom of expression. His next trial date is tomorrow, 15 December, when he could be sentenced.

Nabeel Rajab's trial is ongoing and if convicted, he could face up to 15 years in prison on charges relating to his criticism of Bahrain's participation in Saudi Arabia-led military operations in Yemen which, according to the United Nations, have so far been responsible for the deaths of more than 900 civilians, and included numerous unlawful airstrikes on markets, homes, hospitals and schools. In October, after months of trial hearings, the court reopened his case for investigation. It was an act which revealed the court's absent independence: have nothing to convict him on, they refuse to release him of these charges.

Nabeel Rajab's comments on Twitter about the Saudi-led coalition airstrikes in Yemen led to his arrest on 2 April 2015. Bahrain's penal code provides for up to 10 years in prison for anyone who "deliberately announces in wartime false or malicious news, statements or rumours. The authorities released him on 13 July 2015, but the Prosecution did not close the case and ordered his re-arrest on 13 June 2016. Nabeel Rajab is also facing charges of "offending a foreign country," - Saudi Arabia – and "offending national institutions," for comments about the alleged torture of inmates in Jau Prison in March 2015.

Most recently, Nabeel Rajab was charged again in relation to an open letter he wrote from his prison cell and published in the New York Times on 4 September 2016. The Bahraini authorities immediately responded to this by charging Rajab with "undermining the prestige of the state".

Rajab has been held in pre-trial detention, often in solitary confinement, since June 2016. The United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for Non-Custodial Measures state that "pre-trial detention shall be used as a means of last resort in criminal proceedings, with due regard for the investigation of the alleged offence and for the protection of society and the victim." It is abundantly clear that he is being held to prevent him from carrying through his human rights work.

Nabeel Rajab is the co-founder and president of the Bahrain Center for Human Rights, and holds advisory positions with Human Rights Watch. Amnesty International consider him to be a prisoner of conscience. His human rights activism and his peaceful criticism of the Bahraini authorities has

resulted in his imprisonment on two previous occasions, between May 2012 and May 2014, and between January 2015 and July 2015.

Mrs May, last week you were in Manama to launch your new policy towards the Gulf, announcing a “bold vision”. To date, the Government of the UK has never publicly called for the release of any prisoner of conscience in Bahrain, despite several years of engagement with the Government of Bahrain and a worsening human rights situation in the country. There is nothing bold in silence over clear human rights violations, and we urge you to now make a public call for Nabeel Rajab’s immediate and unconditional release.

Sincerely,

Bahrain Institute for Rights and Democracy (BIRD)
Index on Censorship
RAFTO Foundation
Americans for Democracy and Human Rights in Bahrain (ADHRB)
European Centre for Democracy and Human Rights (ECDHR)

Correspondence address:
Sayed Alwadaei
Bahrain Institute for Rights and Democracy
45 Chalton Street
NW1 1HY