



Rt Hon Boris Johnson
Secretary of State
Foreign & Commonwealth Office
King Charles Street,
London, SW1A 2AH

20 February 2018

Dear Boris,

We write to express our extreme disappointment in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), for failing to address the punitive trials and unlawful prosecutions of leading Bahraini human rights defender Nabeel Rajab, President of the Bahrain Centre for Human Rights (BCHR). Rajab has already been unlawfully convicted to two years in prison and is facing an additional 15 years over comments made on social media.

The [rhetoric](#) of your office suggests that it will combat measures that restrict civil society, and will seek to protect and improve the treatment of human rights defenders. Rajab's case, however, demonstrates your reluctance to do so in practice when the perpetrator is an ally of the United Kingdom.

Nabeel Rajab's Ongoing Trial; Verdict Expected On 21 February, 2018

Next week, Rajab is expecting a verdict for tweeting critical comments on Saudi Arabia airstrikes in Yemen and alleged torture in a Bahrain prison. If convicted, he will be imprisoned for upto 15 years. The charges against him violate his right to freedom of expression, and there is evidence he has been punished arbitrarily.

On 15 January 2018, the Bahraini Court of Cassation upheld Rajab's two-year prison sentence for speaking to media outlets about human rights abuses in Bahrain. He was accused of "spreading false news" in 2015-16, when in reality, he accurately stated that foreign journalists and international NGOs are prohibited from entering Bahrain and that the imprisonment of opposition actors is politically-motivated and illegal. This verdict was [condemned](#) by numerous human rights groups, as it "illustrates the corruption" of the Bahraini justice system and its general line of policy constructed around blocking any dissident. A spokesperson for the European Union also [issued](#) a statement recently, condemning this sentencing and calling for Mr Rajab's release.

During his time in detention, he spent an excruciating 9 months in solitary confinement, which amounts to torture and ill-treatment. In its concluding observations on Bahrain published on 29 May 2017, the United Nations Committee Against Torture (UN CAT) drew attention to Nabeel Rajab's case and expressed that it is "deeply concerned" by the arbitrary imprisonment, torture and ill-treatment of detained human rights defenders.

FCO Disastrous Policy

We note the UK Government has previously taken an interest in Rajab's case by attending his trials. The FCO, however, has failed to condemn his sentence or call for the charges against him to be dropped.

The human rights situation in Bahrain has continued to [worsen](#) in 2017. Despite being aware of the violations taking place, your office [continues](#) to provide identical responses, including futile advice to take concerns to human rights oversight bodies, such as the Bahraini Ministry of Interior Ombudsman. In May 2017, UN CAT criticised these bodies, [stating](#) that "those bodies are not independent, that their mandates are unclear and overlap, and that they are not effective".

Since 2012, the UK has spent more than [£5 million](#) on technical assistance to Bahrain, and has allocated a further £1.5million this year, to support Bahraini oversight bodies. Since these mechanisms have demonstrably failed to end widespread torture and hold perpetrators to account, the technical assistance programme has merely served to whitewash Bahrain's appalling human rights record.

Rajab's case is a clear demonstration of how the FCO's approach is simply inadequate. Your failure to take any serious action in relation to Bahrain's reprisals against human rights defenders emboldens the Bahraini government to pursue further reprisals and therefore makes you complicit in these abuses. The significant ties we have with Bahrain ensures that any criticisms made by the UK will carry weight. As a democratic state that is built on the premise of respecting freedom of expression, it is your responsibility to acknowledge and condemn the negative developments in Bahrain.

Our Requests

The UK must take immediate measures to support Nabeel Rajab in the face of the reprisals he has suffered merely for exercising his freedom of expression. Consequently, we urge you to condemn Rajab's sentence and call on the Government of Bahrain for his immediate and unconditional release. Further, we urge you to review UK funding to Bahrain, given that the technical assistance programme has only helped to strengthen the culture of impunity in the country, and has failed to improve the human rights situation.

Yours Sincerely,

Lord Hylton	Crossbench
Caroline Lucas MP	Green Party
Mary Glendon MP	Labour
Kerry McCarthy MP	Labour
Andy Slaughter MP	Labour
Matt Western MP	Labour
Sandy Martin MP	Labour
Ronnie Campbell MP	Labour
Roger Godsiff MP	Labour
Grahame Morris MP	Labour
Rachael Maskell MP	Labour
Peter Kyle MP	Labour
Nic Dakin MP	Labour
Paul Flynn MP	Labour
Hilary Benn MP	Labour
Anneliese Dodds MP	Labour
Tom Brake MP	Liberal Democrat
Sir Edward Davey MP	Liberal Democrat
Lord Scriven	Liberal Democrat
Chris Stephens MP	SNP
Stephen Gethins MP	SNP
Chris Law MP	SNP
Hannah Bardell MP	SNP
Martyn Day MP	SNP
Joanna Cherry QC MP	SNP