

MEP call for the release of Nabeel Rajab

Brussels, 28 October 2014

We, the undersigned Members of the European Parliament, call for the immediate and unconditional release of Mr. Nabeel Rajab — President of the Bahrain Center for Human Rights, Director of the Gulf Center for Human Rights, Deputy Secretary General of the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), and member of the Human Rights Watch's Advisory Board.

We believe that his arrest, interrogation and arbitrary detention in relation to an offending tweet are meant as [a form of reprisal](#) against Mr. Rajab for his recent advocacy on behalf of human rights in Bahrain. His advocacy recently included speaking before the Human Rights Subcommittee (DROI) of the European Parliament, and participating in the 27th Session of the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva.

Less than 24 hours after completing his human rights advocacy mission in Europe, the Bahraini government summoned Mr. Rajab to the Central Investigations Directorate's (CID) Cyber Crimes Unit for interrogation, whereupon security forces arrested and interrogated him for a number of hours in relation to a tweet he published while abroad. After 19 days in pre-trial detention, Mr. Rajab's court proceedings began to hear opening arguments on 19 October. The court postponed any decision or sentencing until Wednesday 29 October, and has denied Mr. Rajab release on bail.

Given the Bahrain government's history of targeted reprisals of arbitrary detention and torture against Mr. Rajab, including a two-year [arbitrary detention](#) completed in May 2014, we are deeply concerned that Mr. Rajab's renewed arbitrary detention in relation to his free expression is likewise meant as a form of reprisal for his human rights advocacy at EU and UN levels.

In addition to the recent detention of Mr. Rajab, the Bahraini government has also reignited its campaign against the Bahraini-Danish citizens and human rights defenders of the al-Khawaja family. Abdulhadi al-Khawaja continues to serve his arbitrary life sentence in Bahrain after peacefully calling for reforms during the 2011 popular protest movement in the country. His daughter Zainab al-Khawaja — herself a prominent human rights activist who is currently eight months pregnant — now faces fresh charges of insulting the king of Bahrain, a crime that can carry a sentence of seven years imprisonment and a fine up to BD 10,000 (€20,900). Her trial is set to resume on Thursday 20 October.

In February of this year, the European Parliament unanimously passed an [Urgency Resolution](#) recognizing that “the Bahraini authorities continue to violate and restrict the rights [...] of individuals to peaceful protest, freedom of expression and digital freedom, [and that] human rights activists face ongoing systematic targeting, harassment and detention.” The Resolution also called for “the immediate and unconditional release of all prisoners of conscience, political activists, journalists, human rights defenders and peaceful protesters, including Nabeel Rajab [...]”.

We therefore urge the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Member States to publicly condemn the ongoing violations of the basic human rights of free expression in Bahrain, and call for the release of Mr. Nabeel Rajab and other human rights defenders targeted in Bahrain. We further hope that Member States will continue to call on the Government of Bahrain to ensure that all civil society organizations and human rights defenders in the kingdom are able to conduct their work without fear of retaliation or reprisal. Finally, we again urge the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs to stress the European Parliament's calls for imposing targeted restrictive measures (visa bans and asset freezes) against those individuals responsible for, and involved in, the human rights abuses (as documented by the BICI report or by the Special Procedures of the United Nations).

Yours sincerely,

(See list of signatories)

Signatories *(in alphabetical order)*

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2	Ms. Margrete Auken	Greens	Denmark
3	Mr. Petras Austrevicius	ALDE	Lithuania
4	Mr. Brando Benifei	S&D	Italy
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6	Mr. Paul Brannen	S&D	UK
7	Mr. Klaus Buchner	Greens	Germany
8	Mr. Nicola Caputo	S&D	Italy
9	Mr. Matt Carthy	GUE	Ireland
10	Mr. Fabio Massimo Castaldo	EFD	Italy
11	Ms. Nessa Childers	S&D	Ireland
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