



## INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL SUPPORTING FAIR TRIAL & HUMAN RIGHTS

Registration No. 2795/2012

OFFICIAL LETTER HEAD OF THE ORGANIZATION

### **BAHRAINI INJUSTICE: HIGH CRIMINAL COURT OF APPEAL UPHELD 5-YEAR SENTENCE AGAINST HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVIST NABEEL RAJAB**



Nabeel Rajab, president of the pro-democracy movement Bahrain Center for Human Rights

Last Wednesday, the Bahrain High Criminal Court of Appeal upheld the five-year sentence against the leading Bahraini human rights defender Nabeel Rajab for statements he posted on Twitter in 2015. He was charged with “insulting national institutions” for accusing the authorities of torture at Jaw Prison, and sharing a report by Human Rights Watch that detailed conditions at the prison. He was also charged with “insulting a neighboring country” for criticizing Saudi Arabia’s war in Yemen, and finally he was accused of spreading false or malicious news during wartime because he faulted Bahrain for its participation in the Saudi-led coalition bombing Yemen.

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Nabeel Ahmed Abdulrasool Rajab, 53, the president of the Bahrain Center for Human Rights and an Index on Censorship Freedom of Expression Award winner, is a leader of the pro-democracy movement that came to life in 2011, during the Arab Spring uprisings across the region. He has been relentlessly harassed and intimidated for his peaceful human rights work and has been in and out of prison since 2012 on various charges related to his peaceful activism.

In 2012 he was sentenced to three years in jail on charges of inciting protests against the government, and he has spent much of the intervening time in and out of prison on a series of charges related to his criticism of the monarchy.

After this conviction in 2012 he has been banned from leaving Bahrain since November 2014 and further sentenced to other seven more years in prison across two separate trials.

The most recent sentencing of the advocate Nabeel Rajab is the latest step in a long crackdown on dissent in Bahrain, a tiny island kingdom that is home to the United States Navy's Fifth Fleet.

Backed not only by local rulers in neighboring Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates but also by Western powers such as the UK and the US, Bahrain's royal family has used tanks, riot police officers, sweeping arrests and tight censorship to thwart demands for democracy.

**These cases of repression continues to overtly expose Washington's hypocrisy in professing support for human rights. When it comes to practice military interests are the only priority.**

Authorities arrested Rajab on April 2015, and filed charges based on his allegations on social media of torture in Jaw Prison. Authorities released Rajab on humanitarian grounds on July 2015.

In 2016, after meeting John Kerry, then the US Secretary of State, Rajab wrote an Op-Ed to the New York Times. In it, while referring to Bahrain, he addressed John Kerry: "I would like to ask Mr. Kerry now: Is this the kind of ally America wants? The kind that punishes its people for thinking, that prevents its citizens from exercising their basic rights?"

On June 2016, authorities again arrested Rajab, this time for his criticism during a television interview of their refusal to allow journalists and human rights groups into the country. A court sentenced Rajab to a two-year prison term for this criticism, on charges of "spreading false news and rumors about the internal situation in the Kingdom, which undermines the state prestige and status". The High Criminal Court of Appeal upheld that sentence on January 2018.



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He was to be released this month when he would have completed his sentence if it was not for the fact that in February this year, Nabeel Rajab had been sentenced to another five years in prison. The sentence was related to posts and retweets shared on his Twitter account regarding alleged torture in Bahrain's Jaw prison and the killing of civilians in the Yemen conflict by the Saudi Arabia-led coalition.

Since February Rajab had unsuccessfully appealed these convictions on four occasions and was expecting a fifth and final appeal at Bahrain's High Criminal Court of Appeal.

Rajab is one of dozens of human rights defenders, political activists, opposition leaders and journalists that authorities have unjustly imprisoned since quelling anti-government protests in 2011.

Continuing the crackdown that crushed the Arab Spring uprising there seven years ago Nabeel **Rajab's sentence is a clear evidence of the Bahraini government's reinvigorated repression against political opponents and human rights activists in the country.**

"[Rajab's] ongoing detention is further proof of the Bahraini authorities' relentless determination to squash the right to freedom of expression and silence any peaceful criticism," said Lynn Maalouf, Amnesty International's Middle East research director.

According to Maryam al-Khawaja, of the Gulf Centre for Human Rights, "[Rajab] shouldn't spend a day in prison, let alone getting sentenced to five years. But given the situation in the Gulf generally, it's not too surprising, unfortunately."

"Nothing that Nabeel Rajab posted on human rights in Bahrain or the humanitarian crisis in Yemen justifies his spending a single minute behind bars," said Sarah Leah Whitson, Middle East director at Human Rights Watch. "These charges inherently violate Rajab's basic human rights and should have never been brought in the first place."

The charges against Rajab are a clear violation of his right to free expression, protected under article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which Bahrain ratified in 2006.

As those charges were pending, Rajab reiterated his criticisms last May in another opinion column in The New York Times appealing to President Trump on the eve of his trip to Riyadh, the Saudi capital. "It fills me with shame that my country, Bahrain, is bombing Yemen, with United States support," Rajab wrote, adding, "What I have endured is a small fraction of what the people of Yemen have suffered, largely because of the military intervention of Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and their allies."



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United Nations agencies say that the Saudi-led air campaign in Yemen has contributed to a humanitarian disaster, including thousands of indiscriminate civilian casualties as well as widespread famine and disease. A recent report by a United Nations panel concluded that the two sides had reached a stalemate neither could win, and that a Saudi-led blockade of the country has “had the effect of using the threat of starvation as an instrument of war.”

“Our countries have a wonderful relationship together,” Trump said during an appearance in Riyadh last spring with the king of Bahrain, Sheikh Hamad bin Isa al-Khalifa. “There has been a little strain, but there won’t be strain with this administration.”

Trump dropped requirements imposed under President Barack Obama for improved human rights before any arms sales. And, after a meeting with the crown prince of Bahrain in late November, Trump said on Twitter that the kingdom had agreed to spend as much as \$9 billion on unspecified “commercial deals,” including the F-16s.

Rajab’s sentence on Wednesday was “a slap in the face to justice,” Heba Morayef, the Middle East director at Amnesty International, said in a statement. “It is absolutely outrageous that he be forced to spend a further five years in jail simply for daring to voice his opinions online.”

**His ongoing detention is further proof of the Bahraini authorities’ relentless determination to squash the right to freedom of expression and silence any peaceful criticism.**

ICSFT strongly condemns the arbitrary and unlawful imprisonment of Rajab and the relentless harassment and intimidation the high-profile activist has seen since his involvement as a peaceful activist during the Bahrain uprising in 2011, during which time he has been in and out of prison on numerous occasions. He has been in prison on a continual basis since June 2016, period of time in which his health has deteriorated significantly.

Nabeel Rajab is being persecuted by Bahraini authorities for expressing his opinion. **Opinions are not crimes!**

The authorities should release him, and Bahrain’s allies which profess support for human right values – especially the US and the UK – should turn beautiful statements into real actions by advocating at the highest levels for his release.