

Ms. Federica Mogherini  
High Representative for the Union Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and  
Vice President of the European Commission  
European Commission  
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B-1049 Brussels

Brussels, 13 June 2017

**Concern: MEPs CALL FOR THE RELEASE OF BAHRAIN HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDER, NABEEL RAJAB**

Dear High Representative Mogherini,

We are writing to share with you our deep concern regarding continuing human rights violations in Bahrain, and in particular the ongoing detention of Nabeel Rajab. With the duration of his arbitrary detention reaching a full year today, we urge you to call for Mr Rajab's immediate release.

Nabeel Rajab is the 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 International Federation of Human Rights (FIDH), and a member of the Human Rights Watch Middle East advisory committee. Arbitrarily detained since 13 June 2016, he has already spent more than 11 months in pre-trial detention, due to repeated adjournments of his trial contrary to international standards.

Nabeel Rajab currently faces trials in two separate cases: one is related to tweets and retweets posted in 2015 about the Saudi-led coalition airstrikes in Yemen and allegations of torture in Jau prison; the other is related to televised interviews he gave in 2015 and 2016 on Bahrain's ban on foreign press. Based on charges that include "offending a statutory body", "disseminating false rumours in time of war", and "publishing and broadcasting false news that undermines the prestige of the state", he is facing up to 18 years in prison. Bahraini authorities have also interrogated Nabeel Rajab about articles he published while in detention in [The New York Times](#) and [Le Monde](#). These cases remain with the Public Prosecution Office for investigation into allegations of spreading "false or malicious information". Rajab's trials have been postponed continuously. The most recent hearings were scheduled on 17 May and 12 June but both have been postponed to 14 and 13 June, respectively.

Nabeel Rajab, 53, is suffering from health problems that have worsened in detention after months spent largely in solitary confinement and denied access to proper care. Early in April 2017, he was hospitalised for a bleeding ulcer and brought back into custody soon after his surgery despite contrary medical advice. As a result, Rajab's surgical wound became infected and necessitated his re-hospitalisation. A week before the May hearings, the United Nations Committee Against Torture (UN CAT) issued a [strong criticism of Bahrain's record on torture and ill-treatment](#), stating that it was "deeply concerned" by the arbitrary imprisonment, torture and ill-treatment as well as access to medical care of detained human rights defenders, including Nabeel Rajab.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The CAT Concluding Observations also referred to Messrs. Abdulhadi Al-Khawaja, former BCHR President, sentenced to life in prison in June 2011 for politically motivated charges; Naji Fateel, co-founder of the Bahrain Youth Society for Human Rights (BYSHR) and blogger; Abduljalil Al-Singace, an engineer and blogger; Hussain Jawad, President of the European-Bahraini Human Rights Organisation; and Abdulwahab Hussain, co-founder of Al Wefaq, Bahrain's main opposition party, from which he resigned to form the Al Wafa' Islamic Movement.

Nabeel Rajab's trials take place amid prolonged and widespread reprisals against civil society, human rights defenders, and government critics in Bahrain. On 23 May 2017, Bahraini security forces raided a peaceful sit-in in support of leading Shia cleric Sheikh Isa Qassim in Duraz, [leaving five protesters dead](#), dozens more injured and 286 arrested. On 31 May, [the last major opposition society, Wa'ad, was dissolved](#) and their assets confiscated. On 4 June, the Ministry of Information Affairs [suspended Al Wasat](#), widely seen as the only independent newspaper in Bahrain.

We, Members of the European Parliament, share [Nabeel Rajab's belief](#) that “*respecting human rights and fundamental freedoms is the way to attain peace, stability and prosperity in any nation*”. Nabeel Rajab is not a criminal. His ongoing arbitrary detention and the repeated adjournments of his trial sessions are unacceptable. The international community must not stand silently as the Bahraini authorities intensify their crackdown on civil society. We therefore request that you and the European Union Member States urge the Government of Bahrain both publicly and privately to:

- **Immediately and unconditionally release Nabeel Rajab and all political prisoners;**
- **Ensure he is granted immediate and regular access to his lawyer, his family, and any medical treatment he may require;**
- **Halt the harassment of those who peacefully exercise their freedom of speech or assembly.**

Nabeel Rajab is just one case among many others in Bahrain and the broader Gulf region. The governments of Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Kuwait, and Oman all maintain excessive restrictions regarding exercising the rights to free expression and association. We urge you to call for the release of imprisoned human rights activists by each of the governments of the Gulf Cooperation Council.

We look forward to hearing back from you on these issues and stand ready to provide any further information you may require.

Many thanks,

*Martina Anderson*

*Petras Austrevicius*

*Beatriz Becerra Basterrechea*

*Lynn Boylan*

*Matt Carthy*

*Fabio Massimo Castaldo*

*Nessa Childers*

*Ignazio Corrao*

*Fabio De Masi*

*Mark Demesmaeker*

*Pascal Durand*

*Tanja Fajon*

*María Teresa Giménez Barbat*

*Ana Maria Gomes*

*Enrique Guerrero Salom*

*Stelios Kouloglou*

*Barbara Lochbihler*

*Paloma Lopez Bermejo*

*Claude Moraes*

*Alessia Maria Mosca*

*Javier Nart*

*Liadh Ní Riada*

*Pier Antonio Panzeri*

*Kati Piri*

*Carolina Punset*

*Michèle Rivasi*

*Lola Sánchez Caldentey*

*Judith Sargentini*

*Alyn Smith*

*Barbara Spinelli*

*Bart Staes*

*Ernest Urtasun*

*Elena Valenciano*

*Hilde Vautmans*

*Julie Ward*

*Josef Weidenholzer*