

## PRESS RELEASE - THE OBSERVATORY

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### **BAHRAIN: Court postpones verdict for the fifth time for human rights defender Nabeel Rajab, facing up to 15 years in jail**

**Paris-Geneva, December 15, 2016 – For the fifth time in a row, Court postpones verdict of human rights defender Nabeel Rajab as he remains jailed for his tweets and his human rights activities in violation of his right to freedom of expression. Furthermore, the health of Mr. Rajab has seriously deteriorated since his arrest in June 2016. “Mr. Rajab should be released immediately and unconditionally”, says the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders.**

On December 15, 2016, after a fifteen minutes hearing during which **Nabeel Rajab** was not allowed to speak, the Fourth High Criminal Court postponed the verdict until December 28, 2016 and refused to release him, after he has spent more than six months in pre-trial detention.

**“In a sad parody of justice, Bahraini authorities are punishing Nabeel Rajab for exercising his right to freedom of expression. We are calling for his immediate and unconditional release”,** said FIDH President Dimitris Christopoulos.

Nabeel Rajab is 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 FIDH from 2012 to 2016 and a member of the Middle East advisory committee at Human Rights Watch. He was arrested on June 13, 2016 on several charges and has suffered from poor health in prison including irregular heartbeats, an ulcer and problems with his gallbladder.

Nabeel Rajab is facing up to 15 years in prison on charges related to comments posted on *Twitter* in 2015 about the conditions of detention in Jaw prison and the war in Yemen. According to the United Nations, the Saudi-led coalition airstrikes in Yemen have so far been responsible for the deaths of thousands of civilians.

**“When Bahrain’s most prominent human rights defender is in jail for speaking out on rights violations, it sends a chilling message about the status of human rights in the country”,** said OMCT Secretary General Gerald Staberock.

Mr. Rajab is facing charges of allegedly “offending a foreign country” (Saudi Arabia) and “offending national institutions” for the comments about the alleged torture of inmates in Bahrain’s Jaw Prison in March 2015. In September 2016, an additional charge was brought against Mr. Rajab following the publication on September 5, 2016 of an Op-Ed in *The New York Times* with his by-line, which discussed the conditions of his imprisonment and arrest. He was charged with “intentionally broadcasting false news and malicious rumors abroad impairing the prestige of the state”, which carries an additional one-year prison term.

His peaceful human rights activism and 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. In 2013, the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention (UN WGAD) found that Mr. Rajab’s detention was arbitrary, noting that the “domestic laws of Bahrain (...) seem to deny persons the basic right to freedom of opinion, expression”<sup>1</sup>.

The Observatory calls upon the Bahraini authorities to immediately and unconditionally release Mr. Nabeel Rajab and to comply with relevant international human rights standards

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<sup>1</sup> Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, Opinion A/HRC/WGAD/2013/12 No. 12/2013, July 25, 2013, available at: <http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G13/159/40/PDF/G1315940.pdf?OpenElement>.

and instruments, in particular the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights of 1966, and the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders of December 9, 1998.

*The Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders (the Observatory) was created in 1997 by FIDH and the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT). The objective of this programme is to intervene to prevent or remedy situations of repression against human rights defenders. FIDH and OMCT are both members of [ProtectDefenders.eu](https://www.protectdefenders.eu), the European Union Human Rights Defenders Mechanism implemented by international civil society.*

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