



**Middle
East
Studies
Association**
of North America, Inc.

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June 16, 2016

Shaikh Hamad bin 'Issa Al Khalifa
Office of His Majesty the King
PO Box 555
Rifa'a Palace, al-Manama, Bahrain
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Your Majesty,

We write on behalf of the Middle East Studies Association of North America (MESA) and its Committee on Academic Freedom in vigorous protest of the arrest of Nabeel Rajab, the prominent human rights defender, on what appear to be political grounds amidst a far-reaching crackdown on advocates for freedom of thought and expression in your country. We urge the Bahraini authorities to release Mr. Rajab without delay and to remove the restrictions on his activities and those of his colleagues.

MESA was founded in 1966 to promote scholarship and teaching on the Middle East and North Africa. The preeminent organization in the field, MESA publishes the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* and has nearly 3,000 members worldwide. MESA is committed to ensuring academic freedom and freedom of expression, both within the region and in connection with the study of the region in North America and elsewhere.

Nabeel Rajab is one of the best-known advocates for human rights in the Arab world. He is president of the Bahrain Center for Human Rights and founding director of the Gulf Center for Human Rights. At our 2011 annual meeting, we were honored to welcome Mr. Rajab, who accepted our Academic Freedom Award on behalf of faculty, students and staff at Bahraini institutions of higher education who had spoken out against state abuses that year, including arbitrary arrests, suspensions and terminations of university personnel.

Mr. Rajab was arrested in the early morning hours of June 13. He is charged with "spreading false information over social media." As of this writing, the precise meaning of this allegation is unclear, though he was previously arrested in 2015 on the basis of critical statements he made on Twitter about the maltreatment and torture of inmates in Bahrain's Jaw prison and the Saudi-led bombardment of Yemen. For the first statement, Mr. Rajab was accused of "insulting a statutory body" and, for the second, of "disseminating false rumors in time of war." Mr. Rajab was let go before trial, but the authorities did not drop the charges, so it is possible that this most recent arrest is a continuation of that prosecution.

Such a prosecution would be clearly political in nature. International and regional human rights organizations have documented numerous and severe violations as a result of Saudi-led airstrikes in Yemen and at Jaw prison. We have also written to you several times about one of the prisoners in Jaw, Dr. Abduljalil Al-Singace, a professor of mechanical engineering at the University of Bahrain who was arrested as part of the mass roundups of pro-democracy activists in 2011. Dr. Al-Singace

remains jailed on a life sentence despite his poor health and after being designated by Amnesty International as a prisoner of conscience.

Nabeel Rajab's arrest coincides with a new campaign of state retribution against Bahrainis who are working for greater democracy and respect for human rights in your country. The police took Mr. Rajab into custody on the first day of the thirty-second session of the UN Human Rights Council. The preceding day, six other activists were prevented from boarding a plane to Geneva to attend the session and informed that a travel ban had been imposed upon them. The previous week, another prominent advocate, Zainab Al-Khawaja, was compelled to leave Bahrain for de facto exile in Denmark after she was threatened with re-arrest and indefinite detention. She had been arrested in March and released in May on "humanitarian grounds."

We call on Your Majesty to intervene personally to secure Nabeel Rajab's immediate and unconditional release and the dismissal of all charges against him. We renew our pleas for the prompt release of Dr. Abduljalil Al-Singace. We further appeal to Your Majesty to affirm publicly that state harassment of Bahraini human rights defenders will cease and that freedom of thought and expression, including academic freedom, will henceforth enjoy the full protections they are guaranteed by international law.

We look forward to your timely response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'B. Baron' followed by a long horizontal flourish.

Beth Baron
MESA President
Professor, City University of New York

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Amy W. Newhall' in a cursive style.

Amy W. Newhall
MESA Executive Director
Associate Professor, University of Arizona

cc:

H. E. Ambassador Sheikh Abdullah bin Mohammed Al Khalifa, Embassy of the
Kingdom of Bahrain