



**Middle  
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December 5, 2016

Shaikh Hamad bin 'Issa Al Khalifa  
Office of His Majesty the King  
P.O. Box 555  
Rifa'a Palace, al-Manama, Bahrain  
Fax: +973 1766 4587

Your Majesty,

We write on behalf of the Middle East Studies Association of North America (MESA) and its Committee on Academic Freedom to express our strong objection to the ongoing detention of prominent human rights defender Nabeel Rajab on what appear to be political grounds, and to urge the Bahraini authorities to release him immediately and unconditionally.

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.

One of the most prominent advocates for human rights in Bahrain, Nabeel Rajab 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 had the honor of meeting 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, including arbitrary arrests, suspensions and terminations of university personnel.

For his tireless work peacefully promoting human rights and speaking out against injustices, Mr. Rajab has been repeatedly targeted by the Bahraini authorities. He was imprisoned from 2012 to 2014, from April to July of 2015, and has remained in custody since June 2016. Moreover, he has been subject to a travel ban since November 2014. Upon his most recent arrest, on June 13, 2016, about which we wrote to you on June 16, 2016, Mr. Rajab was charged with "spreading false rumours in time of war," "insulting public authorities [the Ministry of Interior]" and "insulting a foreign country." His trial began on July 12 and has continued since then, with several postponements. Mr. Rajab has denied the charges, all of which appear to stem from comments (posted in 2015 on Twitter and retweeted) relating to the Saudi-led war on Yemen and the mistreatment and torture of inmates in Bahrain's Jaw prison. While he was arrested in 2015 because of these comments, he was released without trial, but the authorities did not drop the charges against him. In our letter of June 16, we requested that you intervene

personally to secure his immediate and unconditional release and the dismissal of all charges against him. At the most recent hearing, on October 31, the High Criminal Court in Manama rescheduled the hearing for December 15 to allow a court-appointed cybercrimes expert to further investigate Mr. Rajab's Twitter account.

It is important to note that a letter printed under Nabeel Rajab's name appeared in the opinion pages of the *New York Times* on September 4, 2016. The "Letter from a Bahraini Jail" describes his own treatment and that of several thousand political prisoners and rights advocates by the Bahraini authorities. It urges the Obama administration to use its influence to both promote human rights in Bahrain and resolve the ongoing conflict in Yemen. The day after the publication of this letter, the Public Prosecutor in Bahrain interrogated Mr. Rajab about the letter and charged him with "spreading false news and statements and malicious rumours that undermine the prestige of the state." We understand that this latest charge is to be adjudicated at a separate trial.

We are truly dismayed by the ongoing harassment of Nabeel Rajab and many other Bahraini human rights advocates. Indeed, under separate cover, we have protested to you regarding the systematic and unwarranted travel bans imposed not only on Mr. Rajab but also on other members of the Bahrain Center for Human Rights. We call upon you to desist from pursuing those who peacefully exercise their rights. We urge you and your government to uphold the constitutional rights of Bahraini citizens and repeal laws that criminalize the peaceful exercise of the rights to freedom of expression, association, and assembly. We appeal to you to have Nabeel Rajab released immediately and unconditionally, have all charges against him dropped, and allow him to continue his important work.

We look forward to your 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 script.

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

cc:

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