



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

3542 N Geronimo Ave
Tucson AZ 85705 USA

tel 520-333-2577
fax 520-207-3166
caf@mesana.org
www.mesana.org



March 1, 2018

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 to you on behalf of the Committee on Academic Freedom of the Middle East Studies Association of North America (MESA) to express our profound dismay at the sentencing of the prominent human rights defender Nabeel Rajab to five years in prison for expressing his opinions on social media. This is the fourth letter our Committee has written to you about Mr. Rajab in the last two years (the previous ones were dated 26 July 2017 and 16 June and 5 December 2016) to register our deepest concern at his continued incarceration, the array of ongoing charges and cases against him, and reports of a significant deterioration in the conditions of his detention. We reiterate our anger at Mr. Rajab's sentencing for "spreading false news" and "offending a foreign country" and urge you to act immediately to address the weaknesses in due process that the multiple cases against Mr. Rajab and others in your country expose.

MESA was founded in 1966 to support scholarship and teaching on the Middle East and North Africa. The preeminent organization in the field, the Association publishes the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* and has nearly 2500 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 an internationally recognized human rights advocate in Bahrain and the Gulf region and the 2011 recipient of MESA's Academic Freedom Award, which he accepted on behalf of faculty, staff, and students at higher education institutions in Bahrain who had spoken out against abuses of state power during that year. As President of the Bahrain Center for Human Rights and a founding director of the Gulf Center for Human Rights, Mr. Rajab's attempts to hold the state publicly accountable for abuses of power have resulted in repeated periods of incarceration since 2012 and the imposition of a travel ban in 2014 that prevented him from leaving the country.

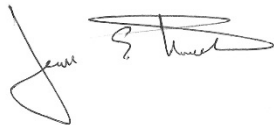
On 21 February 2018, Mr. Rajab was convicted of violating Article 133 ("disseminating false rumors in times of war"), Article 215 ("offending a foreign country"), and Article 216 ("insulting a statutory body") of Bahrain's Criminal Code. These charges relate to Tweets and re-Tweets made by Mr. Rajab in 2015 regarding allegations of torture in Jaw Prison in Bahrain and the targeting and killing of civilians in Yemen by Saudi-led coalition forces. Although Mr. Rajab was arrested on these charges in June 2016, his trial was postponed twenty times, during which time Mr. Rajab's family reported that he had been moved to solitary confinement in September 2016 and transferred to a segregated wing at Jaw Prison in November 2017 that is used to hold detainees convicted of terrorism offences, including membership in the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS).

We note with alarm that Mr. Rajab faces multiple other charges that suggest a coordinated campaign to silence a leading critic of the crackdown on political opponents and human rights activists since the 2011 uprising in your country. Mr. Rajab is already serving a separate two-year prison sentence for comments he made during television interviews in 2015 and 2016; on 15 January 2018 the Court of Cassation in Bahrain upheld his sentence on grounds of “disseminating false news, statements, and rumors about the internal situation of the Kingdom that would undermine its prestige and status.” Additionally, Mr. Rajab faces charges of spreading false news after the *New York Times* published an opinion piece by him in September 2016 entitled “Letter from a Bahraini Jail,” and spreading malicious rumors after another article, “Berlin et Paris, révissez vos liens avec les monarchies du Golfe,” was published in *Le Monde* in December 2016.

Your Majesty, we consider the cases against Mr. Rajab consistent with the stifling and criminalization of freedom of speech and association in Bahrain. Political societies associated with opposition groups have been dissolved and their leaders imprisoned, and *Al-Wasat*, Bahrain’s only independent newspaper, was closed in June 2017 for “repeatedly publishing information that sows division in society.” Political and human rights activists in Bahrain assert that dozens of travel bans have been imposed since August 2017 in an apparent campaign of intimidation and deterrence against them. Moreover, your government stripped 47 people of their citizenship on 31 January and a further 25 on 1 February; according to *Human Rights Watch* this brings the overall number of cases in which citizenship has been revoked since 2011 to 578. Between 29 January and 1 February, your government also deported eight people who were made stateless by the loss of their citizenship, in violation of Article 15 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Article 29 of the Arab Charter on Human Rights, which affirm every person’s right to a nationality.

We call on you and your government to respect the constitutional rights of Bahraini citizens and internationally recognized standards of due process and freedom of expression and association, and we urge you to pardon Mr. Rajab and drop all remaining charges against him and others in similar situations.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Judith E. Tucker', written in a cursive style.

Judith E. Tucker
MESA President
Professor, Georgetown University

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Amy W. Newhall', written in a cursive style.

Amy W. Newhall
MESA Executive Director



March 1, 2018
Re: Nabeel Rajab
Page 3

cc:

His Excellency Shaikh Khalid bin Ali bin Abdullah Al Khalifa
Minister of Justice, Islamic Affairs, and Awqāf
Fax +973 1753 6343

His Excellency Rashid bin Abdullah bin Ahmed Al Khalifa
Minister of Interior
Fax +973 1757 2222

His Excellency Shaikh Khaled Bin Ahmed bin Mohamed Al Khalifa
Minister of Foreign Affairs
contactus@mofa.gov.bh

His Excellency Shaikh Abdullah Bin Mohammed bin Rashid Al Khalifa
Ambassador of Bahrain to the United States
Fax 202 362 2192
ambsecretary@bahrainembassy.org