

PRESS RELEASE - THE OBSERVATORY

BAHRAIN: The verdict on Nabeel Rajab's appeal expected on December 11

Paris-Geneva, November 8, 2012. *The Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, a joint programme of the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) and the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT), deploras the Bahrain Appeals Court's refusal to refer a petition for preliminary ruling on the legality of the law prohibiting demonstrations in Bahrain and to release Nabeel Rajab, who has been arbitrarily detained since July 9, 2012.*

On November 8, 2012, the Bahrain Appeals Court resumed the hearing on the appeal against the three years' imprisonment sentence pronounced against Mr. **Nabeel Rajab**, President of the Bahrain Centre for Human Rights (BCHR), Director of the Gulf Centre for Human Rights (GCHR) and FIDH Deputy Secretary General¹, on August 16, 2012 by the Lower Criminal Court for three cases related to his participation in peaceful gatherings in favour of fundamental freedoms and democracy. The hearing was attended by Mr. Antoine Aussedat, French lawyer, who was mandated by the Observatory to conduct an international trial observation mission. He was the only observer mandated by an international NGO. Several diplomats representing France and the USA also attended the hearing.

During the hearing, a new request for Nabeel Rajab's provisional release was rejected by the Court. Then eight videos were shown: five videos filed by the Prosecutor displaying images shot by the police on the demonstration in relation to which Nabeel Rajab had been arrested and three videos filed by the defence lawyers containing speeches or interviews attesting that Nabeel Rajab advocated for non violence, a video of a demonstration during which Nabeel Rajab was charged and hurt by the police and extracts from a pro-government TV broadcast in which Nabeel Rajad was depicted as a dangerous agitator and manipulator. The content of the videos was discussed by the court and the defence lawyers.

Finally the court denied a petition filed by his lawyers to refer to the Supreme Court a question for a preliminary ruling on the constitutionality and legality of the law banning demonstrations in Bahrain, with regard to international conventions and announced that the verdict would be made public on December 11, 2012.

"The issue of the legality of the law on gatherings is key. I deeply regret that the court refused to refer this fundamental question to the Supreme Court. It sends an alarming signal as to what could be the final outcome of this judicial process", said FIDH President Souhayr Belhassen.

"We reiterate our concern about the continuing judicial harassment faced by Nabeel Rajab and his prolonged arbitrary detention, which seem to merely aim at sanctioning his legitimate human rights activities. Accordingly, the authorities must drop all charges held against him and immediately and unconditionally release him, in compliance with the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international human rights instruments ratified by Bahrain", concluded OMCT Secretary General Gerald Staberock.

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¹ Mr. Rajab is also a member of the Advisory Committee of Human Rights Watch's Middle East Division and Chair of CARAM Asia.