



GULF CENTER
FOR HUMAN RIGHTS



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1 August 2016

The Honorable John F. Kerry
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Kerry,

We write to raise our serious concerns with the Government of Bahrain's continued repression against peaceful dissent, including the renewed prosecution of Nabeel Rajab, president of the Bahrain Center for Human Rights (BCHR). The State Department Spokesperson recently [noted](#) the Government of Bahrain's detention of Nabeel is "not consistent" with its promise to implement human rights reforms. In June, Vice President Biden [called](#) King Hamad bin Isa Al-Khalifa to express "strong concerns regarding recent negative developments" in the country, while you, yourself, recently [stated](#) that Bahraini authorities' recent actions "undermine Bahrain's cohesion and security" and threaten broader regional stability. Yet, the crisis in Bahrain is continuing to worsen.

On 13 June, the Bahraini government [arrested](#) Rajab, the country's most prominent human rights defender. He is the Founding Director of the Gulf Centre for Human Rights (GCHR), Deputy Secretary General of International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), and a member of the MENA Advisory Board of Human Rights Watch (HRW). The Public Prosecution subsequently [charged](#) him with allegedly "spreading false news and rumors about the internal situation in a bid to discredit Bahrain," in connection with two television interviews. While in jail on this charge, he was then sent to trial for a previous charge related to two tweets he posted in 2015. If he is found guilty in the latter case, Rajab may face up to 13 years in prison, merely for exercising his right to freedom of expression.

Since Rajab's arrest, authorities have [subjected](#) him to solitary confinement and unsanitary living conditions. Rajab has lost approximately 15 pounds and suffers from a number of health conditions, which have worsened since his arrest. Bahraini authorities have postponed his trial, and refused his defense lawyers' request for release pending his court appearance.

Rajab's arrest comes amid a deepening human rights and political crisis in Bahrain, in which the government has moved to close nearly all space for civil society and peaceful dissent. The Bahraini government has shut down the largest opposition political party in the country, more than [doubled](#) the prison sentence of that party's leader for his peaceful speech, and revoked the citizenship of Sheikh Isa Qassim, the preeminent spiritual leader for Bahrain's Shi'a community.

The United States, as a close ally of Bahrain, must demonstrate a firm commitment to human rights in Bahrain and show that further steps to silence peaceful dissent will not be overlooked. Therefore, we call on you to direct the U.S. Ambassador to Bahrain, William Roebuck, to attend Rajab's trial tomorrow, 2 August, as an international observer. His presence will help demonstrate that further moves toward repression in Bahrain only undermine the country's stability and strain the bilateral relationship.

Sincerely,

Americans for Democracy & Human Rights in Bahrain (ADHRB)
Bahrain Center for Human Rights (BCHR)
Bahrain Institute for Rights & Democracy (BIRD)
European Center for Democracy and Human Rights (ECDHR)
Gulf Center for Human Rights (GCHR)
Human Rights First (HRF)
Justice Human Rights Organizations (JHRO)
Physicians for Human Rights (PHR)
Project on Middle East Democracy (POMED)
Reporters Without Borders (RSF)
Solidarity Center