

PRESS RELEASE - THE OBSERVATORY

BAHRAIN: The Observatory denied access to observe the trial of Nabeel Rajab

Paris-Geneva, October 28, 2014 – The verdict of the trial against human rights defender Nabeel Rajab, Deputy Secretary General of FIDH, President of the Bahrain Centre for Human Rights (BCHR) and Director of the Gulf Centre for Human Rights (GCHR) and, is to be made public on October 29. The Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, a joint programme of FIDH and OMCT has unsuccessfully attempted to get authorisations to enter the country to observe the trial.

On October 29, 2014, the Third Lower Criminal Court should announce the verdict of the trial held against Mr. **Nabeel Rajab** on charge of “insulting a public institution” via Twitter. The alleged offence concern tweets he published on Twitter, which the Criminal Investigation Department deemed insulting to the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Defence, pursuant to Article 216 of the Bahraini Penal Code, punishable by up to three years of imprisonment. Mr. Rajab has been detained since the date of his summons for interrogation on October 1. The Observatory recalls that Mr. Rajab had just returned to Bahrain following an international advocacy tour at the United Nations and European Union, and there are strong reasons to believe that he has been targeted in particular due to his advocacy for human rights violations committed in his country in violation of international human rights standards.

The Observatory intended to have a trial observer for the October 19 and 29 hearings to monitor their compliance with the requirements of the right to a fair trial. Unfortunately despite the Observatory's efforts, the Bahraini authorities have failed to respond to the Observatory's request for a visa in violation of Bahrain's commitment to “develop and maintain an open and engaged relationship with the human rights community”. This lack of cooperation is all the more concerning given that Bahrain will host the future Arab Court of Human Rights.

It is crucial that the upcoming hearing comply with the international standards of fair trial, as well as with the provisions of the 1998 United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Defenders and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The Observatory condemns the lack of cooperation of the Bahraini authorities and urges the latter to comply with their international human rights commitments, in particular by guaranteeing the free and unhindered access of human rights NGOs to the Bahraini territory. Finally, the Observatory calls for the immediate release and the end of the judicial harassment against Mr. Nabeel Rajab and all human rights defenders in Bahrain.

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