PARLAMENTO EUROPEO

DEPUTATO AL PARLAMENTO EUROPEO

HM Shaikh Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa
Office of HM the King
P.O. Box 555
Rifa'a Palace
Kingdom of Bahrain

Brussels, 16 October 2015

Your Majesty,

The European Parliament is seriously concerned about the continued human rights abuses and limitations of freedoms suffered by the Bahraini population, peaceful civil and political society actors.

The European Union has a strong stance against any kind of torture or inhuman or degrading treatment, as proven by the EU Council Guidelines on Torture, other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment adopted in 2001, updated in 2012. We are very concerned about the treatment human rights defenders and peaceful human rights activists receive in Bahrain. The case of Nabeel Rajab is particularly worrying. The European Parliament lastly expressed its concerns over the detention and treatment Mr Rajab was faced with in Bahrain with an Urgency Resolution of 9 July 2015 in which the EP strongly objects to the detention and proceedings opened by the government against Nabeel Rajab as a direct reprisal for his peaceful work as a Human Rights Defender.

Mr Rajab has been now released from prison, where he was serving a 6 months' sentence for a tweet he wrote in September 2014. Despite his release, Mr Rajab is still subject to considerable limitations to his fundamental rights. He currently faces up to 10 years in prison for expressing his opinion through a series of tweets he wrote in 2015. He was further accused of "insulting a statutory body" by denouncing acts of torture in Jau prison via an opinion piece in March 2015 where he stated, "Prisoners have rights and prisons should be centres of rehabilitation. In Bahrain, inmates are punished for being inmates, and punished collectively. Torture is a crime against humanity, yet it is a constant feature in Jau." From the European Parliament we strongly condemn the use of torture and other inhuman or degrading treatment, and deeply regret the arrest of Mr Rajab in connection with his criticism of torture practices.

Since his release in July 2015, Nabeel Rajab is, once more, subject to a travel ban which greatly limits his freedoms and is a clear obstacle for the performance of his duties as a human rights defender. Mr Rajab should not be prevented from travelling if he wishes so, on a personal or professional basis, and we strongly oppose his travel ban.

The international community has expressed its outcry for Mr Rajab's case in several occasions. The United Nations working group on Arbitrary Detention has found the detention of Mr Rajab arbitrary and contrary to articles 19, 20 and 21 of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights and articles 9, paragraph 1, 14, 21 and 22 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, both to which Bahrain is a party. Further, the United Nations Special rapporteurs on human rights defenders, on

the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression, and on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association called the July 2015 release of Mr Rajab only a "half measure" as he is still facing charges and up to 10 years in prison, and remains subject to a travel ban.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights mentioned Human Rights violations in Bahrain during the opening remarks of the 29th session of the UN Human Rights Council in June 2015 and stated that "All those detained in connection with their peaceful activities should be released" in Bahrain. In addition, in a statement from 5 June 2015, the office of the UN High Commission for Human Rights again voiced its concern for the detention and imprisonment of Nabeel Rajab, referring to him as "one of Bahrain's most prominent and respected human rights defenders".

Freedom of expression is a universal right but in Bahrain people exercising their freedom of speech and association face reprisals and prosecution. The government has punished Mr Rajab on several occasions for his peaceful criticism and opinions. In May 2012 he served a two-year prison sentence as a consequence of his peaceful participation in assemblies and protests, criminalised by the government. Shortly after his release, and while he was conducting meetings in the European Parliament, Nabeel issued another tweet which cost him a 6 months sentence in prison for "insulting a statutory body".

Besides Mr Rajab, hundreds of other human rights defenders, civil and political activists, including children, also find themselves victims of reprisals, ill-treatment and discrimination and are serving prison sentences for exercising their right to freedom of expression and association. We strongly condemn the Bahraini government's line of behaviour as it violates international law, and is against the fundamental values of the European Union, as highlighted in the Treaties and in the European Union guidelines on Freedom of Expression Offline and Online of 2014.

We, as members of the European Parliament, call on the government of Bahrain to lift the travel ban imposed on Mr Nabeel Rajab, which severely limits his fundamental freedoms, as guaranteed under international law, and poses direct hurdles to his work as a human rights defender.

We also call on the Bahraini government to drop all charges against Mr Rajab, and we condemn the criminalisation of dissent and free speech. We call on the government to release all human rights defenders, peaceful dissents and political opposition members from prison.

We call upon His Majesty to comply and thoroughly implement the recommendations issued by the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry's report in 2011, as well as the recommendations issued by the UN Human Rights Council under the Universal Period Review on Bahrain, second cycle, of 2012, and by the European Union on the human rights situation in Bahrain. These recommendations entail a deep re-structuring of the promotion of human rights and freedom of speech in Bahrain, which need to be entrenched into the government's actions. The government of Bahrain must abide by its obligations under international law, having particular regard to human rights and basic freedoms.

Yours sincerely,

Members of the European Parliament

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