

US BACKED BAHRAIN REGIME: Canadian Man Freed From Jail Nightmare, while Hundreds of others Continue to Languish in Prison

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The nightmare is over for Canadian man Naser Al Raas after he gained his freedom from a five-year prison sentence in Bahrain.

Family and supporters were jubilant after an appeal court in the Persian Gulf Kingdom acquitted Naser of all charges on Wednesday.

Their relief over the ruling was made all the more emphatic because the 29-year-old Canadian citizen suffers from a congenital heart condition. Nearly a year of illegal detention, torture and military court hearings had taken a severe toll on his health. He was even denied access by the Bahraini regime to the prescription medicine to treat his pulmonary embolism.

With a five-year jail term imposed earlier this month, his family feared that it would in effect be a death sentence, given his weakened condition.

However, the miscarriage of justice case of Naser Al Raas gained much international public support. Among those who called for his release were the Canadian surgeon Fraser D Rubens who previously treated Al Raas at the Ottawa Heart Institute, and Liberal MP Irwin Cotler.

Following Naser's release this week his fiancée, Zainab, who had led the campaign for his freedom, expressed her deep gratitude to all those who had given their support. The couple are now planning to return to Ottawa as soon as personal documents are returned by the Bahraini authorities.

Naser's nightmare began last March when he was detained by Bahrain's Ministry of Interior officers as part of the Saudi-led crackdown against the pro-democracy movement. He had the misfortune of being in Bahrain for a family holiday when the Gulf kingdom erupted in popular protests calling for the downfall of the US-backed Al Khalifa monarchy – protests that have only grown in intensity despite nearly a year of brutal repression.

Like thousands of other Bahrainis, Naser was thrown into prison and subjected to weeks of torture. He was tried in a military court without any legal representation and was forced to sign a confession claiming that he had attempted to kidnap a police officer. That charge was eventually dropped, but he was convicted of lesser offences, including “attending illegal rallies” and “defaming the regime”, and sentenced to five years in prison. The Canadian

consistently protested his innocence of all charges.

During his nearly year-long ordeal, the Canadian government maintained a conspicuous silence regarding his gross maltreatment by the US-backed regime. But as a result of growing public support for Naser's plight, there is a suspicion that the Ottawa government of Prime Minister Stephen Harper belatedly intervened to press for his freedom – especially given the outrageous breach of human rights and Canada's shameful official silence on the matter.

Supporters point out that while Naser's jail nightmare in Bahrain may have ended, he now faces a life-long legacy of dealing with the severe mental and physical abuse suffered at the hands of the regime. Some legal experts say that the conditions of his violation in Bahrain make for a prosecution case in an international court of justice against the Bahraini regime, as well as the Canadian government.

Human rights campaigners also point out that hundreds of other innocent Bahrainis continue to languish in the kingdom's prisons for doing nothing more than peacefully protesting for their basic democratic rights. Yet despite the widespread violation of human rights and international law, the unelected Al Khalifa monarchy continues to receive fulsome support from Washington and other Western governments.

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NOTES

Previous Global Research articles on the case of Naser Al Raas:

[1] Wake Up Canada: Canadian Citizen Faces Risk of Death From Jail Ordeal in Bahrain
<http://www.globalresearch.ca/index.php?context=va&aid=29015>

[2] Bahrain: Canadian Government Silence Over Torture Reeks of Hypocrisy
<http://www.globalresearch.ca/index.php?context=va&aid=27755>

[3] Canadian Citizen Tortured in Bahrain... But Harper Government Keeps Silent
<http://www.globalresearch.ca/index.php?context=va&aid=25666>

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