

Canadian's Prison Release in Bahrain Raises Hopes of Freedom

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Global Research, February 07, 2012

7 February 2012

Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#)

Canadian citizen Naser Al Raas was unexpectedly released from prison in Bahrain earlier this week, raising hopes that he may soon be able to return to Canada a free man.

His family is hoping that the reprieve from custody on medical grounds may signal his eventual acquittal or royal pardon. Relatives have been told that a legal decision will be made on 16 February. His plight has attracted widespread international public support, despite the seeming indifference of the Canadian government to intervene.

As reported by Global Research last week [1] there were concerns for Naser's life because of his chronic heart complaint, which has been exacerbated by months of ill treatment and lack of prescribed medication. One of his supporters is Canadian surgeon Fraser D Rubens who previously treated Al Raas at the Ottawa Heart Institute; the surgeon testified in a letter to the Bahraini regime that incarceration would be life threatening. See also our earlier reports on the case [2] [3].

Al Raas had begun a five-year sentence last week after being convicted by a military court on various charges, including "illegal assembly" and "spreading false rumours" against the royal rulers of the Persian Gulf kingdom.

The 29-year-old IT specialist from Ottawa has denied the charges. Despite having a critical heart condition, Al Raas was earlier detained for several weeks under illegal circumstances, was denied a lawyer, and subjected to severe torture, as verified by human rights groups. The prosecution case against him was solely on the basis of a confession, which he says he was forced to sign.

His ordeal began on 20 March when he tried to leave Bahrain after visiting the island on a family holiday just as the kingdom was being convulsed in a crackdown by Bahraini and Saudi forces against the pro-democracy movement – a crackdown that continues unabated despite a paucity of coverage in the Western corporate-controlled media.

The harrowing conditions suffered by Al Raas have been meted out to thousands of Bahrainis since the mainly Shia-led pro-democracy uprising erupted last February against the unelected Western-backed Sunni regime. The Al Khalifa ruling monarchy is described by Washington and London as "a key ally". The former British colony serves as the base for the US Navy's Fifth Fleet and is seen a military staging post for the Persian Gulf.

But what distinguishes Al Raas' case is the marked silence by the Canadian government over his gross maltreatment. While Canada has supported Western military and diplomatic

pressure on Libya, Syria and Iran, Ottawa has said little to nothing over Bahrain and in particular the plight of Naser Al Raas. Critics point out that this illustrates a cynical double standard by Canada and Western governments generally in which intervention on the purported grounds of humanitarian rights is but a pretext for self-serving political interests for regime change in the instances of Libya, Syria and Iran, while in Bahrain the vested interest by the West is to maintain the regime, regardless of its brutality – therefore, silence, despite egregious human rights violations. The Ottawa government of Stephen Harper appears to be kowtowing to Washington’s expedient imperialist agenda.

Repeated appeals by Al Raas’ family to the Canadian government have been met with muted response from Ottawa. Global Research has reported that a nascent bilateral trade deal between the Bahraini regime and the Canadian government that took several years to negotiate may also be a factor in Ottawa’s silence over the Al Raas case.

His fiancée last week made a heartfelt plea to Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper when Al Raas began his sentence. “We are asking Mr Harper to please do something – now – to stop this nightmare for Naser. My fiancé has done nothing wrong. He is an innocent Canadian citizen who has been put through hell and now his life is in danger because of this barbaric treatment. For God’s sake Mr Harper help one of your citizens.”

Al Raas’ partial release this week may signal that discreet diplomatic moves have been belatedly made. Nevertheless, his family and supporters are urging the Western public to keep up the pressure on the Ottawa government to secure his liberty [4].

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NOTES

[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>

[4] Members of the public are urged by Amnesty International and family supporters of Naser Al Raas to write to Canada’s foreign minister Diane Ablonczy calling on the Canadian government to demand his full release by the Bahraini regime. Write to diane.ablonczy@parl.gc.ca

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Finian Cunningham has written extensively on international affairs, with articles published in several languages. Many of his recent articles appear on the renowned Canadian-based news website [Globalresearch.ca](#). He is a Master's graduate in Agricultural Chemistry and worked as a scientific editor for the Royal Society of Chemistry, Cambridge, England, before pursuing a career in journalism. He specialises in Middle East and East Africa issues and has also given several American radio interviews as well as TV interviews on Press TV and Russia Today. Previously, he was based in Bahrain and witnessed the political upheavals in the Persian Gulf kingdom during 2011 as well as the subsequent Saudi-led brutal crackdown against pro-democracy protests.

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