

UAE: Appeal for UAE to release detained human rights activists ahead of Dubai Expo



30-September-2021

Your highness Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed al Nahyan,

As the Expo Dubai 2020 opens for six months starting on 1 October 2021 in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) under the motto “Connecting Minds and Creating the Future through sustainability, mobility and opportunity”, we the undersigned call on the Emirati authorities to demonstrate their commitment to these values by releasing all imprisoned human rights defenders and activists, detained in violation of their right to freedom of expression.

We further call on the UAE authorities to comply with international standards for prisoners, including by allowing regular family visits, access to healthcare and regular consultations with their lawyers, and ending the practice of holding them in solitary confinement.

Approaching ten years behind bars, the group of pro-democracy advocates, known as the “UAE 94”, remain unjustly jailed for signing an online petition calling for political reform in 2011. Following a grossly unfair mass trial, 69 members of the UAE 94 were sentenced to between seven and 15 years, including eight *in absentia*. They are held in Al-Razeen prison, a maximum-security facility in the desert of Abu Dhabi, where activists, government critics and human rights defenders are commonly held. They face arbitrary and unlawful disciplinary measures, such as solitary confinement, deprivation of family visits, and intrusive body searches.

Sentenced to seven years in prison, four of these political prisoners remain imprisoned even after completing their sentences, according to Emirati activists. **Abdullah Al-Hajiri, Omran Al-Radwan Al-Harathi** and **Mahmoud Hasan Al-Hosani** completed their sentences in 2019, and Fahd Al-Hajiri in 2020. Instead of being granted release, these prisoners were transferred to a so-called Munasaha centre, a “counselling centre” within Abu Dhabi’s Al-Razeen prison facility. Three UAE 94 prisoners currently serving 10-year sentences are human rights lawyers Dr. **Mohammed Al-Roken** and Dr. **Mohammed Al-Mansoori**, and Sheikh **Mohammed Abdul Razzaq Al-Siddiq**.

Prior to the authorities’ arbitrary dissolution of the UAE’s Jurists Association in 2011, Dr. Al-Roken and Dr. Al-Mansoori served terms as its president. In 2012, they were arbitrarily arrested for signing the 2011 reform petition and for their dedicated work as human rights lawyers defending victims of repression. Detained in Al-Razeen prison, the men reported that they were tortured, as well as subjected to arbitrary disciplinary measures such as denial of family visits, according to Emirati activists.

In 2011, Dr. Al-Roken bravely defended five human rights activists in a case known as the “UAE5”. Among them were prominent human rights activist and poet **Ahmed Mansoor** and academic Dr. **Nasser bin Ghaith**. Although the defendants in the case were pardoned by presidential decree at the time, both Mansoor and bin Ghaith were given 10-year prison sentences in subsequent cases, which involved grossly unjust trials on spurious charges.

Ahmed Mansoor serves on the advisory boards of the Gulf Centre for Human Rights (GCHR) and Human Rights Watch’s Middle East division and won the Martin Ennals Award for Human Rights Defenders in 2015. Since his second arrest in March 2017, he has been held in solitary confinement in a 4 x 4 meter cell with no bed or mattress in Al-Sadr prison, Abu Dhabi. He was sentenced to 10 years in prison in May 2018. In protest, he went on two hunger strikes in March and September 2019, which have severely impacted his health. His condition has been further exacerbated by the denial of adequate medical care.

Economist Dr. Nasser bin Ghaith has faced similar mistreatment in prison, where he had to resort to three separate hunger strikes to attempt to bring attention to his unjust conviction and inhumane detention conditions. Dr. Bin Ghaith, a lecturer at the Abu Dhabi branch of Paris-Sorbonne University, was sentenced to 10 years in prison for his online criticism of the Emirati and Egyptian authorities. Despite his hunger strikes, prison authorities have consistently denied Dr. Bin Ghaith appropriate medical care, including his prescribed blood pressure medication.

In September 2021, the European Parliament adopted a [resolution](#) calling for “the immediate and unconditional release of Ahmed Mansoor, Mohammed al-Roken and Nasser bin Ghaith as well as all other human rights defenders, political activists and peaceful dissidents.” The resolution insists that the Emirati government “guarantee that human rights defenders in the UAE are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities in all circumstances, both inside and outside the country, without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions, including judicial harassment.” This is far from being the case: the UAE authorities have squashed dissenting voices to such a degree in recent years that it can now be said that there are no human rights defenders left in the country, and freedom of expression and civic space are virtually non-existent.

In light of the upcoming Dubai Expo, and the UAE's candidacy for a seat on the United Nations Human Rights Council in 2022, we urge the Emirati government to consider using this opportunity to prove to the international community a true commitment to human rights by unconditionally releasing all jailed human rights defenders. In particular, we urge the authorities to free all prisoners who have been denied release after the completion of their sentence. Their ongoing detention constitutes an outrageous violation of both domestic and international law.

Pending their release, we appeal to Your Highness to ensure that prisoners are granted access to basic amenities in their cells such as a bed, blankets in winter and air conditioning in summer, to have regular family visits, and to be allowed outside their cells to have contact with other prisoners in the canteen or the yard, as provided for by the UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners. With the spotlight on the UAE from October 2021 to March 2022, the Emirati government has a unique opportunity to show good-will and a commitment to international law by addressing the aforementioned human rights abuses, including by releasing from prison our jailed friends and colleagues.

Sincerely,

Signed:

1. ACAT Cameroon
2. ACAT Canada
3. ACAT Central African Republic
4. ACAT Germany
5. ACAT Italia
6. ACAT UK
7. Access Center for Human Rights (Wousoul)/Centre d'accès pour les droits de l'homme (ACHR)
8. Action by Christians for the Abolition of Torture (ACAT) Belgium/Belgique/Belgie
9. ActiveWatch
10. Africa Freedom Information Centre (AFIC)
11. Albanian Media Institute (AMI)
12. ALQST for Human Rights
13. Americans for Democracy & Human Rights in Bahrain (ADHRB)
14. Amman Center for Human Rights Studies (ACHRS)
15. Amnesty International
16. Arab Human Rights Centre in Golan Heights
17. Arab Organisation for human Rights in the UK
18. Article 19
19. Association Marocaine des droits de l'Homme
20. Association for Victims of Torture in the UAE (AVTUAE)
21. Bahrain Press Association (BPA)
22. Bangladesh Institute of Human Rights
23. Banglar Manabdhikar Suraksha Mancha (MASUM)
24. Bytes for All, Pakistan
25. Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (CIHRS)
26. Center for Media Freedom & Responsibility
27. CIVICUS
28. Detained International

29. Emirates Detainees Advocacy Centre (EDAC)
30. English PEN
31. European Centre for Democracy and Human Rights (ECDHR)
32. Federal Association of Vietnamese Refugees in the Federal Republic of Germany
33. FIDH, within the framework of the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders
34. Forum Tunisien pour les Droits Économiques et Sociaux (FTDES)
35. Freedom Expression Institute (FXI)
36. Front Line Defenders
37. Global Voices Advox
38. Globe International Center
39. Greek Helsinki Monitor
40. Gulf Centre for Human Rights (GCHR)
41. Human Rights Association for the Assistance of Prisoners
42. Human Rights Sentinels
43. Human Rights Watch
44. IFoX Initiative for Freedom of Expression – Turkey
45. Independent Journalism Center
46. Innovation for Change Middle East and North Africa (I4C MENA)
47. International Association of People’s Lawyers (IAPL)
48. International Campaign for Freedom in the UAE (ICFUAE)
49. International Press Centre (IPC)
50. International Service for Human Rights (ISHR)
51. Iraqi Civil Society Solidarity Initiative (ICSSI)
52. JusticeMakers Bangladesh
53. Landless Workers Movement (MST)
54. Lawyers for Lawyers
55. Lebanese Center for Human Rights
56. Ligue Algérienne de défense des droits de l’Homme
57. Maharat Foundation
58. Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA)
59. Media Institute for Southern Africa, Zimbabwe (MISA)
60. Medical Action Group, Inc.
61. MENA Rights Group
62. Metro Center for Journalists Rights & Advocacy
63. Mwatana for human rights
64. Odhikar
65. PEN America
66. PEN Canada
67. PEN International
68. Peter Tatchell Foundation
69. Programme Against Custodial Torture and Impunity (PACTI)
70. Project on Middle East Democracy (POMED)
71. Promo LEX Association, Republic of Moldova
72. Social Media Exchange (SMEX)
73. Society for threatened peoples (GfbV), Germany
74. SOHRAM-CASRA Centre Action Sociale Réhabilitation et Réadaptation pour les Victimes de la Torture, de la guerre et de la violence
75. Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression
76. The South East European Network for Professionalization of Media (SEEMO)

77. Tibetan Centre for Human Rights and Democracy (TCHRD)
78. UIA-IROL (Institute for the Rule of Law of the International Association of Lawyers)
79. Vigilance for Democracy and the Civic State
80. World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers (WAN-IFRA)
81. World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT), within the framework of the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders