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**UN Human Rights Council
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15 June – 3 July 2015**

Item 3: Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to development

Interactive Dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers¹

Mr President,

Amnesty International welcomes to this opportunity address the reports of the Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers on Portugal, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates.

PORTUGAL

We share the Special Rapporteur's concern that with growing poverty, access to justice in Portugal has been impaired due to the rise in the costs of that access. This is of particular importance when the judiciary is called upon to assess the constitutionality of austerity measures affecting economic and social rights.

QATAR

In 2011, the Qatari government unfairly arrested and convicted poet Mohammad al-'Ajami for the peaceful expression of his conscientiously held beliefs. He was convicted of breaking vaguely worded laws that did not constitute internationally recognizable criminal offences. Interrogators forced him to sign a document used to convict him. The investigating magistrate served as presiding judge, trial sessions were closed and he was forced to change lawyers. Al-'Ajami's trial was flagrantly unfair. Amnesty International calls for his immediate and unconditional release.

In 2010, the government arrested Filipino migrant worker Ronaldo Lopez Ulep. He was convicted of espionage after being held one month in incommunicado detention. The government has not rebutted allegations of torture during the first eight months of his detention. He and two other Filipino nationals were unfairly tried. There must be a re-trial.

UNITED ARAB EMIRATES (UAE)

Amnesty International is deeply concerned about human rights abuses carried out with impunity in the UAE. Since 2011, UAE authorities have mounted an unprecedented

¹ <http://webtv.un.org/meetings-events/human-rights-council/watch/clustered-id-contd-sr-on-independence-of-judges-lawyers-and-sr-on-health-13th-meeting-29th-regular-session-of-human-rights-council/4304762958001>

crackdown on freedom of expression, association, and assembly. They have prosecuted over 100 activists in proceedings that failed to meet international fair trial standards.²

Vaguely-worded laws severely limit the rights to freedom of expression, association, and assembly. The broad and vague definitions of criminal offences in the 2014 counter-terror law are used to imprison or sentence to death human rights defenders or activists who criticise the government.

The country's State Security body continues to subject scores of UAE and foreign nationals to enforced disappearance in secret detention facilities where torture and other ill-treatment are rampant. Torture is often used in such facilities to extract "confessions" that are later used in court as evidence of defendants' guilt to convict them in unfair trials.

Harassment and intimidation of human rights defenders continues. The authorities have confiscated the passport of prominent human rights defender and former prisoner of conscience Ahmed Mansoor and barred him from travel since 2011, thereby denying him his right to freedom of movement.

Academic and prominent human rights lawyer Dr Mohammed al-Roken is serving a 10-year prison sentence following a mass trial of 94 activists.³ Activist Osama al-Najjar is serving a three-year prison term following secret detention, torture, and questioning about his 2014 meeting with the Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers.⁴ Both men faced unfair trials before the State Security Chamber of the Federal Supreme Court, which does not allow the right to appeal. Amnesty International considers both men prisoners of conscience and calls for their immediate and unconditional release.

Thank you Mr President.

² Amnesty International, There is no freedom here: Silencing dissent in the United Arab Emirates, 18 November 2014 (MDE 25/018/2014) <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde25/0018/2014/en/>;

³ Amnesty International, United Arab Emirates: Stop the charade and release activists convicted at the mass UAE 94 trial (MDE 25/1097/2015), 3 March 2015 <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde25/1097/2015/en/>

⁴ Amnesty International, UAE: Man tortured and jailed after defending imprisoned father on Twitter, 25 November 2014 <https://www.amnesty.org/en/articles/news/2014/11/uae-man-tortured-and-jailed-after-defending-imprisoned-father-twitter/>