

URGENT ACTION

POLITICAL ACTIVIST DETAINED, HEALTH AT RISK

United Arab Emirates (UAE) national Obaid Yousef al-Zaabi has been detained after giving an interview to CNN on 11 December. He had been arrested and charged earlier in the year after tweeting about human rights issues in the country. His whereabouts are unknown and his health, already poor, could deteriorate in detention.

Obaid Yousef al-Zaabi, 56, who describes himself on his Twitter account as a political activist, was arrested by State Security officers in the early hours of 12 December after an interview he had given to CNN aired on television hours earlier. He was interviewed about a US national who has been jailed in the UAE for making a spoof video about Dubai. Obaid Yousef al-Zaabi had spent time in prison with the film-maker earlier in the year. It is believed that Obaid Yousef al-Zaabi may be held, in State Security custody, in a hospital somewhere in Abu Dhabi. He has serious medical conditions, including a form of arthritis. His family have not been informed of his whereabouts and it is unclear whether he has been charged with any offence. It is believed that he has had no access to a lawyer.

In his CNN interview, Obaid Yousef al-Zaabi said that he had been using social media, especially Twitter, to express his opinions and defend human rights, including cases of people detained by the State Security apparatus, and said that he was calling for political reform. He had previously been arrested on 2 July after posting a series of tweets critical of the "UAE 94" trial – a mass trial of 94 government critics and reform advocates, including Obaid Yousef al-Zaabi's brother, Ahmed Yousef al-Zaabi, a former judge and law professor, which violated international fair trial standards. Obaid Yousef al-Zaabi was charged with "offending the Supreme Court", "offending the State Security apparatus" and "instigating people against the rulers and the security of the state", all via his Twitter account. He was released on bail on 4 August due to his poor health. His case is still with the State Security Prosecution's office and has yet to be transferred to a court.

Please write immediately in English or Arabic or your own language:

- Calling on the authorities to release Obaid Yousef al-Zaabi immediately and unconditionally if he has been held solely for the peaceful exercise of his right to freedom of expression;
- Calling on them to ensure that he receives any medical care he may require.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 30 JANUARY 2014 TO:

President

Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan

Ministry of Presidential Affairs

Corniche Road

Abu Dhabi, P.O. Box 280

United Arab Emirates

Fax: +971 2 622 2228

Email: ihtimam@mopa.ae

Salutation: Your Highness

Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi

Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan

Crown Prince Court Bainunah Street

Abu Dhabi, P.O. Box 124

United Arab Emirates

Fax: +971 2 668 6622

Twitter: @MBZNews

Salutation: Your Highness

And copies to:

Vice-President and Prime Minister

Sheikh Mohammed Bin Rashid al-

Maktoum

Office of the Prime Minister

Dubai, P.O. Box 2838

United Arab Emirates

Fax: + 971 4 3531974

Email: info@primeminister.ae

Twitter: @HSHkMohd

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country.

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**



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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Independent political activity in the UAE is severely restricted. In the wake of the large demonstrations since 2011 across the Middle East and North Africa region, a small number of people in the UAE have called openly for greater accountability, transparency and democratization. In response, the UAE authorities have cracked down on freedom of expression and association and people who criticize them have been arrested and charged with vaguely worded national security offences. In November 2012, the UAE government introduced a tough new law on cyber crimes, which makes many activities on social media illegal and punishable by imprisonment and fines.

A number of people have been arrested and imprisoned after being convicted under the law for disclosing details of the "UAE 94" trial or expressing concern over torture allegations on social media platforms, including Twitter. Abdulla al-Hadidi, son of Abdulrahman al-Hadidi, one of the 69 prisoners convicted in the mass trial, was arrested on 21 March 2013 and charged, under the law, with publishing details of the public trial sessions on Twitter. In his tweets, he had questioned why the defendants' allegations of torture during pre-trial incommunicado detention were not investigated and why the judge had forbidden communication between the defendants and their lawyer. In April 2013, Abdulla al-Hadidi was sentenced to 10 months in prison. Active Twitter user Waleed al-Shehhi was arrested on 11 May 2013 after he also expressed concern about the trial on his Twitter feed. On 18 November, he received a two-year prison sentence and a fine of half a million UAE dirhams (around US\$137, 000).

In his tweets, Obaid Yousef al-Zaabi called for a free country where people could live without fear and with dignity and rights. Here are translations of some of his tweets from 4 December 2013, one week before his arrest:

"We will continue to demand our just rights until they are implemented in a free country that we can live in with dignity and full rights with just organizations and a complete parliamentary system in a society free of fear."

"We will continue to demand a stop to the encroachment of authoritarian security forces on our lives and their purging of our freedoms and rights and their promotion of a culture of fear in society and their halting of a free and dignified life."

"We will continue to maintain our dignity and rights for all citizens and implement their right to true and active political participation and to stop the looting of lands, petrol and maintenance of the wealth of the collective."

"We will continue to demand social equality and the guarantee of fair distribution and holding those who need to be held accountable..."

Obaid Yousef al-Zaabi's CNN interview is available online (<http://newday.blogs.cnn.com/2013/12/11/u-s-man-in-jail-in-dubai-over-parody-video>).

Name: Obaid Yousef al-Zaabi

Gender m/f: