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UAE: Human rights lawyers among 13 detained as crackdown intensifies

Dr Mohamed 'Abdullah al-Roken, a long-time Amnesty International member and a well-known human rights defender and lawyer, was arrested at 1:30 am on Tuesday as he drove to a Dubai police station to report the disappearance five hours earlier of his son Rashid Mohamed al-Roken and son-in-law 'Abdullah al-Hajeri.

He was one of the defence lawyers in last year's prominent case of five political activists – known as the 'UAE 5' – who were arrested, tried and imprisoned for defaming top UAE government officials.

He is among 13 men – including fellow human rights defender, the lawyer and former head of the UAE Jurists' Association Dr Mohamed al-Mansoori – who have been arrested since 16 July by state security officers (*Amn al-Dawla*).

"We believe Mohammad al-Roken and Mohammad al-Mansoori to be prisoners of conscience, held solely on account of their defence work as lawyers and other peaceful human rights activities. [This is not the first time they have been persecuted for their legitimate human rights work](#). They must be released immediately and unconditionally," said Ann Harrison, Deputy Middle East and North Africa Programme Director at Amnesty International.

"The UAE authorities must halt this intensified crackdown on human rights defenders and other activists across the Emirates."

The arrests were carried out after the Abu Dhabi Public Prosecutor on 15 July announced an investigation into a group of people for allegedly plotting "crimes against state security", "opposing the UAE constitution and ruling system", as well as having ties to "foreign organizations and agendas".

State security officers (*Amn al-Dawla*) arrested most of the men either at their homes or at their places of work, confiscating computers and personal documents in the process.

"Unless the other 11 men are to be charged with an internationally recognizable criminal offence, they must be released. In the meantime, the authorities must reveal their whereabouts and ensure no harm comes to them while in custody," said Ann Harrison.

Besides al-Mansoori and al-Roken and his relatives, the remaining detainees include the director of the Centre for the Memorization of the Qur'an 'Abd al-Rahman al-Hadidi, and activists Rashid al-Shamsi, Hussain al-Najjar, Omran al-Radhwan, Khaled al-Shaiba, Dr Ibrahim al-Yassi, Mohamed al-Hoosani, 'Isa al-Sari and Khalifa al-Nu'aimi.

Some of those held are associated with the Reform and Social Guidance Association (*al-Islah*).

In a separate development, on Monday, UAE authorities forced a member of the 'UAE 5', the 35-year-old blogger and activist Ahmed Abdul Khaleq into exile in Thailand.

In his writings he has defended the rights of the UAE's stateless *Bidun* minority, of which he is a member. Amnesty International considered him a prisoner of conscience during his detention.

Mohamed al-Roken had been advocating for his client not to be expelled in the days before his own arrest.

On Tuesday, [a spokesperson for the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights \(OHCHR\)](#) expressed

his concern at the accelerating crackdown on human rights defenders in the UAE. He referred to harassment, denial of travel, termination of work contracts, arrests, denaturalization and expulsion from the country as methods being used by the UAE authorities to repress activists in the UAE.

In 2008 the UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General on the situation of human rights defenders expressed concern at the treatment of Mohamed al-Roken; while in 2011 she did likewise regarding Mohamed al-Mansoori.

Amnesty International urged the UAE authorities to halt their ongoing crackdown on activists and human rights defenders and to uphold the right to freedom of peaceful expression, association and assembly.

“We’re calling for an end to the UAE’s restrictions on free speech and peaceful protest,” said Ann Harrison.

“Peaceful speech and protest is being penalized in the UAE. It is all the more important that human rights defenders who challenge such violations are allowed to carry out their legitimate work without hindrance in line with international human rights law and standards including the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders.”

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