

PUBLIC

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Health concern

UNITED KINGDOM

Mahmoud Abu Rideh (m), aged 37, Palestinian refugee

Palestinian refugee Mahmoud Abu Rideh, who is the subject of a "control order" imposed by the UK government, attempted suicide in May and is now in a critical condition in hospital. He has been refusing food since his suicide attempt, and on occasion has also refused liquids. His lawyers believe there is a real risk that he will attempt suicide again unless the control order is lifted, or at least relaxed.

Mahmoud Abu Rideh, a stateless Palestinian, was recognized as a refugee in the UK in 1997. He suffers from severe post-traumatic stress disorder. His mental and physical health have been severely damaged by years of persecution at the hands of the UK authorities, and he is often unable to move without the use of a wheelchair.

Control orders restrict the liberty, movement and activities of people suspected of some kind of involvement in terrorism. In Mahmoud Abu Rideh's case, the material on which that suspicion is based has been largely withheld from him and his lawyers. He has been told that he is suspected of various activities, including raising and distributing funds for purposes connected to terrorism. Mahmoud Abu Rideh has not been told the information on which these allegations are based, nor has he been given the chance to clear his name in a criminal trial. He claims that all of the money he raised was for humanitarian purposes, including supporting education projects in Afghanistan.

Mahmoud Abu Rideh was detained without charge between December 2001 and March 2005 under the Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001, on suspicion of being involved in terrorism-related activity. Again, the grounds for that suspicion were kept largely secret from him and from his lawyers. The control order was imposed on him immediately after his "release" in 2005.

The strict obligations imposed by the control order, together with the lasting effects of the time he spent interned in the UK, have had a severe effect on Mahmoud Abu Rideh's physical and mental health. His lawyers say he is "despairing" at the prospect of being subject to a control order indefinitely. Under the terms of his current control order, Mahmoud Abu Rideh is required to stay inside his home for 12 hours a day, and to phone a monitoring company twice a day. He has to report in person to a police station every day. He is not allowed to have any visitors to his home, except those who have been previously approved by the Home Office. He is not allowed to have an internet connection in his home. Any breach of these obligations is considered a criminal offence. These obligations have also had a severe impact on Mahmoud Abu Rideh's family, including his children, who are UK nationals.

A Council of Europe body, the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT), visited Mahmoud Abu Rideh in Belmarsh high-security prison in 2002, and again in 2004 after he was transferred to Broadmoor Special Hospital, one of three high-security mental hospitals in the UK, after a sudden deterioration in his mental health. In its 2004 report the CPT noted that Mahmoud Abu Rideh suffered from a "most severe post-traumatic stress disorder," and that his mental health had "deteriorated seriously, risking permanent damage."

Mahmoud Abu Rideh has been charged with several alleged breaches of his control order, but with no substantive terrorism-related offences. None of the charges relating to breaches of his control order have yet come to trial. He has not been able to see, or to challenge, much of the material on which the government bases the allegation that he is, or has been, involved in terrorism-related activity.

Mahmoud Abu Rideh was the subject of UA 198/02 (EUR 45/010/2002, 28 June 2002 and follow-ups) and UA 108/05 (EUR 45/012/2005, 4 May 2005, and follow-ups). After UA 108/05 the terms of his control order were temporarily relaxed to allow him to receive appropriate medical care.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The system of control orders was brought into UK law by the Prevention of Terrorism Act 2005. This allows a government minister to impose severe restrictions on people suspected of involvement in terrorism-related activity, if the government minister thinks this is necessary for the protection of the public. The control order system is grossly unfair: it relies heavily on secret material which is not disclosed to the people affected by the order or their lawyers. This means that people subject to control orders may not know why they are suspected of involvement in terrorism. Although control orders can be challenged in court, the proceedings fall far short of international standards of fairness. People affected by the orders, and their lawyers, can be excluded from large parts of the proceedings where secret material is being considered. Thus they cannot mount an effective challenge to the orders imposed on them.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in English or your own language:

- urging the Home Secretary to lift Mahmoud Abu Rideh's control order immediately;
- expressing serious concern about Mahmoud Abu Rideh's health and well-being, particularly as he attempted suicide in May;
- calling on the Home Secretary to ensure that Mahmoud Abu Rideh continues to receive any medical attention he may require.

APPEALS TO:

Home Secretary

The Rt Hon Jacqui Smith MP
Secretary of State for the Home Department
Home Office
2 Marsham Street
London SW1P 4DF, UK

Fax: +44 20 7035 4745

Email : public.enquiries@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk

Salutation: Dear Home Secretary

COPIES TO: diplomatic representatives of the United Kingdom accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 31 July 2008.