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United Arab Emirates: Whereabouts of men arrested in raids on coastal towns must be revealed

Amnesty International is seeking urgent clarification regarding the whereabouts and legal status of 20 to 30 young men arrested in early October 2008 in the town of Khor Fakkan in the Emirate of Sharjah and surrounding areas located in the Emirate of Fujairah, both of which form part of the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

In a letter sent this week to the UAE's Minister of the Interior, Major-General Shaikh Saif bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Amnesty International expressed its concern for the safety of those detained, who reportedly include children, and asked for details regarding their place of detention and the legal basis for it. The organization is seeking details of any charges that have been or will be initiated against them and before which court, if any, they are expected to appear.

Amnesty International is calling on the UAE authorities to release those who are not to be charged with a recognizable criminal offence and to bring to trial promptly and fairly any who are.

Reports indicate that some time between 02:00 and 04:00 on the morning of 1 October some 20 to 30 young men, many in their 20s, and at least five under the age of 18, were arrested in raids by security forces in coastal towns including, from north to south, Badiyah, Khor Fakkan and Khor Kalba. According to information received by Amnesty International, ground-based security forces, who were heavily armed and masked and supported by at least one helicopter, raided houses in these towns and carried out the arrests. To Amnesty International's knowledge the UAE authorities have not so far made public these arrests nor did they give any reasons for them.

A similar operation was reportedly carried out on or around 8 October, possibly in the Emirate of Fujairah, during which another 8 to 10 people were arrested.

Information available to Amnesty International indicates that families of those detained in the operations on 1 and on or around 8 October have not been informed where their relatives are being held nor whether they are facing any charges.

Regarding those detained who are under the age of 18, Amnesty International is reminding the UAE government that, as a state party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), children arrested be treated in conformity with the UAE's international obligations. Article 37 of the CRC stipulates that no child should face torture or be deprived of their liberty arbitrarily, and that those who are deprived of their liberty should be "treated with humanity and respect for the inherent dignity of the human person, and in a manner which takes into account the needs of persons of his or her age". Article 40 of the CRC also requires that states parties to the Convention ensure that "every child alleged as or accused of having infringed the penal law... be presumed innocent until proven guilty according to law... [and] be informed promptly and directly of the charges against him or her".

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For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566 or visit our website at <http://www.amnesty.org>