

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT



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United Arab Emirates (UAE): End the arbitrary imprisonment of prominent rights defender Ahmed Mansoor

(Geneva, 20 June 2017) – The Martin Ennals Foundation and the ten human rights organizations that make up the jury of the Martin Ennals Award for Human Rights Defenders (MEA), today renewed their appeal to the government of the United Arab Emirates to release immediately and unconditionally Ahmed Mansoor, the last remaining human rights defender in the UAE who had previously been able to criticize the authorities publicly.

Ahmed Mansoor received the Martin Ennals Award for Human Rights Defenders in 2015.

Three months ago today, in the pre-dawn hours of 20 March about a dozen security officers arrested Ahmed Mansoor at his home in Ajman, about 150 kilometres northeast of Abu Dhabi, the capital of the UAE.

“We urge the UAE government to end the incomprehensible three-month imprisonment of Ahmed Mansoor. This is really about the UAE failing to respect basic principles of justice” said Dick Oosting, Chairperson of the MEA Board.

“The purported case against Ahmed Mansoor beggars belief. States have the duty to bring to justice those whom they suspect of having committed criminal offenses. Yet what is clear is that the UAE authorities have arbitrarily deprived him of liberty and taken him away from his family for peacefully exercising his human right to freedom of expression. The three-month lapse and total lack of transparency indicates, likewise, that the authorities merely wanted to silence him”.

On 20 March, the UAE authorities stated that Ahmed Mansoor was accused of using social media websites, including to “publish false and misleading information that harm national unity and social harmony and damage the country’s reputation,” under the UAE’s repressive 2012 Cybercrime Law, which authorities have used to imprison numerous human rights activists and which provides for long prison sentences and severe financial penalties.

On 28 March, a group of United Nations human rights experts called on the UAE government to release him immediately, describing his arrest as “a direct attack on the legitimate work of human rights defenders in the UAE.” They expressed their fear that his arrest “may constitute an act of reprisal for his engagement with UN human rights mechanisms, for the views he expressed on social media, including Twitter, as well as for being an active member of organizations such as the Gulf Centre for Human Rights, and an active supporter of others, including Human Rights Watch.”

The next day, the UAE authorities responded directly to the statement, disputing the allegation that Ahmed Mansoor’s detention was arbitrary, and stating that he “has the freedom to hire a lawyer and that his family has full access to the place of confinement and is allowed to visit him.”

The government has detained Ahmed Mansoor in Abu Dhabi. It is too far from his home for regular visits from his family, who have only been able to see him once in the last three months. The authorities appear determined to isolate Ahmed Mansoor from his own family.

Despite government assertions that he is able to do so, it appears that he has not been able to appoint an independent lawyer of his own choosing. This is a necessary component of the right to a fair trial.

The right to see a lawyer is a basic right of anyone detained as outlined in article 16 of the Arab Charter on Human Rights, which the UAE has ratified.

The ten human rights organizations that make up the jury of the Martin Ennals Award for Human Rights Defenders reiterate their call to the UAE authorities to release Ahmed Mansoor immediately and unconditionally, since the charges against him relate solely to his human rights work and his right to freedom of expression. In the meantime, he should be granted immediate and regular access to his family and a lawyer of his choosing. The UAE must end their harassment of human rights defenders and critics of the authorities.

SIGNATORIES

Organizations forming the jury of the Martin Ennals Award:

Agency for Diakonia and Development, Germany
Amnesty International
FIDH
Front Line Defenders
Human Rights First
Human Rights Watch
International Commission of Jurists
International Service for Human Rights
HURIDOCs
World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT)

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