

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT

Date 20 March 2020 Index number MDE 25/1998/2020

UAE: AUTHORITIES MUST IMMEDIATELY RELEASE AHMED MANSOOR, WHO HAS SPENT THREE YEARS IN SOLITARY CONFINEMENT SINCE HIS ARREST ON 20 MARCH 2017

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) should immediately and unconditionally release human rights defender **Ahmed Mansoor**, who has so far been in prison for three years in violation of his right to free expression, say Amnesty International and the Gulf Centre for Human Rights (GCHR). While he remains detained, the two organisations call on the UAE authorities to move Mansoor out of solitary confinement and give him a bed, books, adequate medical care and regular access to his family. We also call on them to grant independent international monitors, including United Nations experts, immediate access to Mansoor in prison.

Mansoor is currently serving a 10-year prison sentence after being convicted on 29 May 2018 of the spurious offence of “insulting the status and prestige of the UAE and its symbols including its leaders” in reprisal for his peaceful human rights activism, including through his posts on social media.

“Ahmed Mansoor is not a criminal – he is human rights defender, an engineer, a poet, and a member of GCHR’s Advisory Board. He is a peaceful man, and must be freed to return to his wife and four young sons at home,” said GCHR Executive Director **Khalid Ibrahim**.

Mansoor is being held in solitary confinement in an isolation ward in Al-Sadr prison, Abu Dhabi, in dire conditions with no bed or access to books. Since his arrest three years ago on 20 March 2017, he has only been permitted to leave his small cell for a handful of family visits and only once has he been allowed outside for fresh air in the prison’s exercise yard. In protest, he went on two separate hunger strikes which have damaged his health.

“The prolonged imprisonment of Ahmed Mansoor, who has now spent three years in solitary confinement, is the real indicator of the UAE’s proclaimed role of ‘incubator of tolerance’. When authorities punish individuals in such a cruel and enduring manner simply for exercising their right to freedom of expression, their talk of ‘tolerance’ is nothing but deceitful,” said **Lynn Maalouf**, Amnesty International’s Middle East Research Director.

By holding Mansoor in such appalling conditions, the UAE authorities are in violation of their obligations under the United Nations Convention Against Torture (CAT) and Principle 6 of the Body of Principles, as well as Article 2 of the UAE’s Code of Criminal Procedure.

Mansoor undertook a month-long hunger strike on 17 March 2019 to protest his punitive prison conditions and unfair conviction. On 7 May 2019, seven United Nations independent experts issued a statement, saying they were “gravely concerned over ... Mansoor’s physical well-being” and that “the poor conditions of his detention in the United Arab Emirates, including prolonged solitary confinement, may constitute torture.” The UN experts noted that his conditions violate the Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners, also known as “the Mandela Rules”, which outline basic standards for treatment of detainees, including bedding, visitation, reasonable levels of cell hygiene, appropriate access to healthcare and sanitary facilities, and the prohibition against torture.

Again, in early September 2019, after being beaten by prison guards, Mansoor began a second hunger strike. In October 2019, during a week of action coordinated by Amnesty and GCHR, over 140 NGOs worldwide appealed to the UAE authorities to free Ahmed Mansoor, who spent his 50th birthday in isolation and on hunger strike.

A news release from the UAE’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs on 30 December 2019 claimed that Mansoor underwent a medical examination and received a family visit in November 2019, but said nothing about his health status at the end of the year.

Due to the lack of independent human rights organisations in the country, and access denial to independent monitors, it is very difficult to obtain information about Mansoor’s current situation, including whether or not he remains on hunger strike. As of January 2020, since GCHR’s last report that, he was still not eating solid food, which had weakened him to the point of leaving him unable to walk.

In February 2020, over 60 civil society organisations, writers, personalities and Nobel laureates appealed to the authorities in the UAE to free detained human rights defenders, during the Hay Festival Abu Dhabi. The joint letter was signed by

Nobel laureates **Wole Soyinka** and **Ahmed Galai**, intellectual **Noam Chomsky**, British author and actor **Stephen Fry**, and Egyptian author **Ahdaf Soueif**, who made an impassioned appeal for Mansoor's release.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE UAE AUTHORITIES:

We appeal to the UAE authorities to immediately and unconditionally release Ahmed Mansoor and to ensure that, pending his release, he is detained in conditions that comply with international standards, that he is not subjected to torture or other ill-treatment; and has immediate and regular access to his family and any health care he may require. He must be provided with a bed and sufficient clean bedding, allowed to receive books and reading materials and have regular access to fresh air. We call on the UAE authorities to allow independent monitors access to Ahmed Mansoor.

The upcoming Expo 2020 Dubai, which begins in October, is an opportunity for the UAE to back up its promise of tolerance with actions that include releasing Ahmed Mansoor and other prisoners of conscience, including human rights defenders, and ensuring that no one is held in prison conditions that fall below the minimum accepted international standards.