

# URGENT ACTION

## OMANI BLOGGER PUT ON TRIAL BY SECURITY COURT

**Omani blogger Muawiya al-Ruwahi was put on trial in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) on 14 September, on charges that include “ridiculing the State and its leaders”. He suffers from bipolar disorder and has attempted suicide six times.**

Omani blogger **Muawiya al-Ruwahi** (or al-Rawahi) has been on trial since 14 September before the State Security Chamber of the Federal Supreme Court, where activists, critics of the government and others charged with state security offences are tried. He faces charges under the cybercrime law of “establishing and managing online accounts for the purpose of inciting hate and disrupting public order and social peace” and “ridiculing the State and its leaders.” At the first trial session, Muawiya al-Ruwahi denied the charges and said he had been forced under “mental and physical pressure” to “confess”. Muawiya al-Ruwahi suffers from bipolar disorder. He has tried to commit suicide six times while in detention. He asked the court to order a health check for him, allow him to access his medication, which he said he has been denied for two months, and to admit him to hospital, as he said his health is deteriorating. He told the court: “I am suicidal and I need to be treated to prevent another suicide attempt.”

Muawiya al-Ruwahi was arrested on 23 February 2015 as he entered the UAE from Oman. He was held in a secret detention facility where he was denied access to a lawyer, and transferred to al-Wathba Prison in Abu Dhabi at the end of May. He had posted offensive messages about the UAE authorities on his Twitter account and at least one law firm has declined to represent him because one of the charges relates to his criticism of the UAE’s rulers.

### **Please write immediately in Arabic, English, French or Spanish or your own language:**

- Calling on the UAE authorities to ensure a prompt, independent mental health assessment of Muawiya al-Ruwahi is carried out, and its findings are taken into account by the court in deciding whether to pursue charges;
- Urging them to drop the charge of “ridiculing the State and its leaders”, ensure that any trial for the other charge is transferred to an ordinary criminal court, that he is tried in accordance with international fair trial standards and, in particular, that any statements he has made under duress are not used as evidence against him;
- Urging them to ensure that he is given immediate access to his medication and the health care he requires for his bipolar disorder, if necessary by moving him to a hospital with appropriate mental health facilities;
- Calling on them to ensure that he is protected from torture and other ill-treatment, and is given regular access to his family and lawyer.

### **PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 12 NOVEMBER 2015 TO:**

#### Vice-President and Prime Minister

Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Prime Minister’s Office  
PO Box: 212000, Dubai, United Arab Emirates  
Fax: +971 4 330 4044  
Twitter: @HSHkMohd  
Email (via website):  
<http://www.sheikhmohammed.com/vgn-ext-templating/v/index.jsp?vgnextoid=dec9001ff133e210VgnVCM1000004d64a8c0R>  
CRD

**Salutation: Your Highness**

#### Minister of Interior

Sheikh Saif bin Zayed Al Nahyan  
Zayed Sport City, Arab Gulf Street, Near to Shaikh Zayed Mosque  
POB: 398, Abu Dhabi  
United Arab Emirates  
Fax: +971 2 402 2762/ +971 2 441 5780  
Twitter: @SaifBZayed  
Email (via website):  
<https://www.moi.gov.ae/en/contactus/contactusform.aspx>

**Salutation: Your Highness**

#### **And copies to:**

Minister of Justice  
Dr Hadeef bin Jua’an Al Dhaheri  
Ministry of Justice – Abu Dhabi  
Al Khubirah, Sector 93  
Street 5, P.O. Box 260  
Abu Dhabi  
United Arab Emirates

**Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Please insert local diplomatic addresses below:**

Name Address 1 Address 2 Address 3 Fax Fax number Email Email address Salutation Salutation

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date. This is the second update of UA 64/15 Further information:

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde25/2123/2015/en/>

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### ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

After Muawiya al-Ruwahi had been in custody for a month, he was able to make several telephone calls to his family, including his mother at around the end of March 2015. He had previously told his family that he had been receiving his medication regularly and that the UAE authorities were aware of his mental health condition. According to his father's Facebook page, Muawiya al-Ruwahi was visited in prison by Omani diplomats and the UAE Public Prosecutor on 11 June 2015 and the diplomats were able to speak to him in private. Muawiya al-Ruwahi suffers from bipolar disorder, which is characterized by periods of elevated mood and periods of depression, for which he has been receiving treatment for over five years. His medical records, issued by Oman's Sultan Qaboos University Hospital, are understood to have been sent to the UAE authorities.

Muawiya al-Ruwahi had been arrested several times in Oman. He was summoned in February 2012 to the Omani State Security headquarters after he criticized Oman's head of state Sultan Qaboos in his blog; he was held in a mental health hospital for one week and released without charge. On 12 July 2014, he was arrested after he criticized the Omani authorities again in his blog. He was detained mainly in mental health facilities and was released without charge on 11 August 2014.

In the UAE, Muawiya al-Ruwahi is on trial before the State Security Chamber of the Federal Supreme Court. Amnesty International has previously expressed concern that trials held in this court are inherently unfair because there is no right of appeal, meaning that anyone wrongfully convicted has no judicial means of remedy.

Since 2012, the UAE authorities have arrested hundreds of people, including foreign nationals, on state security offences or for "insulting" UAE leaders or other officials. Many were subjected to enforced disappearance in secret detention centres with the authorities refusing to acknowledge their detention or concealing their fate or whereabouts, placing them outside the protection of the law. Many of those arrested have claimed they were tortured or otherwise ill-treated during interrogations in these secret detention facilities. Enforced disappearance is a crime under international law.

In the UAE, torture and other ill-treatment are often used in these circumstances by the UAE's State Security body to extract "confessions" that are later used in court to convict defendants in unfair trials, even when they have retracted them. Some methods of torture described by defendants include: being slapped and punched in the face; having fingernails pulled out; being suspended upside down for hours; being subjected to electric shocks to different parts of bodies; forced to maintain stress positions for hours; and threatened with rape, death and with HIV infection. The government has failed to implement a February 2014 recommendation by the Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers that it set up an independent committee of experts to investigate allegations of torture.

Under international human rights law, criticism, insult or ridicule of public officials or the State is not a legitimate basis for restricting freedom of expression. Public officials are legitimately subject to criticism and political opposition, and states should not prohibit criticism of them or of public institutions, which is a legitimate exercise of the right to freedom of expression.

Name: Muawiya al-Ruwahi

Gender m/f: m

Further information on UA: 64/15 Index: MDE 25/2531/2015 Issue Date: 1 October 2015