

URGENT ACTION

DETAINED OMANI BLOGGER TALKS OF SUICIDE

Omani blogger Muawiya al-Ruwahi, who suffers from bipolar disorder, has said that he will commit suicide in prison if he is not “treated fairly”. His trial, in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) on charges that include “ridiculing the State and its leaders”, is ongoing.

In a 9 November voice message shared on social media, Omani blogger **Muawiya al-Ruwahi** (or al-Rawahi) said: “I have not received adequate medical treatment [...] If I am not treated fairly, I will go on hunger strike and will commit suicide [...] I have had enough and cannot take it anymore”. Muawiya al-Ruwahi suffers from bipolar disorder and has previously tried to harm himself in detention.

His trial before the State Security Chamber of the Federal Supreme Court began on 14 September on charges 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” under the cybercrime law. So far four trial sessions have taken place and during both of the October sessions the judge requested that Muawiya al-Ruwahi be examined by psychiatric specialists. According to Muawiya al-Ruwahi these examinations have not taken place. On 9 November, the judge ordered that psychiatric examinations be carried out by three specialists to determine his degree of responsibility. Additionally, while the Prosecution told the court that he had been provided with dental treatment after complaining of severe pain, Muawiya al-Ruwahi said that in fact he had only received an eye check-up. The next trial session has been scheduled for 7 December.

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, but he denies the charges. Muawiya al-Ruwahi said he was forced to “confess” under “mental and physical pressure”.

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

- Calling on the UAE authorities to ensure that Muawiya al-Ruwahi be given immediate access to the independent health care professionals he requires for his bipolar disorder and other ailments, if necessary by moving him to a hospital with appropriate mental health facilities;
- 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;
- 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 24 DECEMBER 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://bit.ly/1Jpw4BI>

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 third update of UA 64/15. Further information:

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde25/2531/2015/en/>

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Muawiya al-Ruwahi was first diagnosed with a personality disorder in 2004 and subsequent medical reports issued by Oman's Sultan Qaboos University Hospital confirmed him as suffering from bipolar disorder. Bipolar disorder is characterized by periods of elevated mood and periods of depression, for which he had been receiving treatment. His medical records have been sent to the UAE authorities.

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 and the diplomats were able to speak to him in private.

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.

At the beginning of his trial before the State Security Chamber of the Federal Supreme Court on 14 September he asked the court to order a health check for him, allow him to access his medication (which he said he had been denied for two months) and to admit him to hospital. He told the court: "I am suicidal and I need to be treated to prevent another suicide attempt." 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 25/2852/2015 Issue Date: 12 November 2015