

URGENT ACTION

JOURNALIST CHARGED FOR FACEBOOK POST

Jordanian poet and journalist Tayseer Salman al-Najjar appeared before the Criminal Chamber of the Federal Appeal Court in Abu Dhabi on 18 January, and again on 1 February, facing charges of “damaging the reputation and prestige of the Emirati state”, in connection with a comment he posted on Facebook. His next hearing has been scheduled for 15 February.

Tayseer Salman al-Najjar, a poet and a journalist specialising in culture for the Abu Dhabi al-Dar newspaper, appeared before the Criminal Chamber of the Federal Appeal Court in Abu Dhabi, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) capital, on 18 January. This was his first court appearance since his arrest in December 2015. He was officially charged with “publishing information with the aim of damaging the reputation and prestige of the Emirati state”, in connection with a comment he posted on his Facebook account in 2014. In this comment he praised the Palestinian resistance in Gaza and criticised countries including the UAE; he denies “insulting” the UAE. The hearing was adjourned to 1 February so that he could be represented by a lawyer. His next trial session has been scheduled for 15 February.

On 3 December 2015, Tayseer al-Najjar, 43, was at Abu Dhabi airport, on his way to Jordan to visit his family, when he was approached by the authorities who told him he was banned from leaving the UAE and that he was to report daily to the security authorities. On the morning of 13 December 2015, he received a phone call summoning him to the Security Department in Abu Dhabi. He spoke to his wife on the phone at 7pm, just before entering the building. He was arrested shortly after. Tayseer al-Najjar’s family were unaware of his whereabouts and the reason for his arrest until he was allowed to call them on 18 February 2016. He told them that he was being held at a State Security facility in solitary confinement and put under “heavy pressure” to confess. About ten days later, he made another call to his wife stating that he had been transferred to al-Wathba prison in Abu Dhabi, where he remains held. Tayseer al-Najjar had been held in detention for a little over a year awaiting trial. In this time he had not had access to a lawyer.

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

- Calling on the UAE authorities to release Tayseer Salman al-Najjar immediately and unconditionally as he has been held solely for peacefully exercising his right to freedom of expression;
- Urging them to ensure that, pending his release, he is protected from torture and other ill-treatment, and given any necessary medical treatment he may require.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 28 MARCH 2017 TO:

Vice-President and Prime Minister

HH Sheikh Mohammed Bin
Rashid al-Maktoum
Prime Minister’s Office
PO Box: 212000
Dubai, United Arab Emirates
Fax: +971 4 330 4044
Email: info@primeminister.ae
Twitter: @HSHShkMoh

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
Email: moi@moi.gov.ae

Salutation: Your Highness

And copies to:

Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi
HH Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al
Nahyan
Crown Prince Court
King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz
Al Saud Street,
P.O. Box: 124
Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates
Fax: +971 2 668 6622
Twitter: @MBZNews

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 first update of UA 112/16. Further information:

www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde25/4019/2016/en/

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Tayseer Salman al-Najjar is married and a father to five young children who live in Jordan. He moved from Jordan to the UAE in April 2015 to join Al Jewa, a large publishing house in the UAE, ahead of the January 2016 launch of al-Dar, a weekly newspaper for which he wrote the cultural pages.

In July 2014, during the Gaza conflict, Tayseer al-Najjar had posted on his Facebook page: “Message to some journalists and writers who do not like the Gazan resistance ... There is no two rights in one case, but the right one is the Gazan resistance and all else is bad, such as Israel, the UAE, Sissi [the President of Egypt] and other systems that are no longer ashamed of shame itself.”

Since 2011, the UAE authorities have mounted an unprecedented crackdown on freedom of expression and association in the country. The space for dissent has shrunk severely and many people, both Emiratis and non-Emiratis who have criticised the UAE authorities, their policies, or the human rights situation in the country have been harassed, arrested, tortured, or subjected to unfair trial and imprisonment. The authorities have arrested, detained, and prosecuted more than 100 activists, human rights defenders and other critics of the government, including prominent lawyers, judges and academics, on broad and sweeping national security-related or cybercrime charges and in proceedings that fail to meet international fair trial standards. Some individuals previously subjected to enforced disappearance have said they were tortured or otherwise ill-treated and were forced to make “confessions” during interrogations without the presence of a lawyer. The State Security Chamber of the Federal Supreme Court often allows the use of such “confessions,” in contravention of international human rights law, and convicts defendants even when they have repudiated them.

On 29 November 2016, Federal Law No.11/ 2016 entered into force. This law concerns the Federal Judicial Authority, which introduced an appeals procedure for cases relating to state security. Trials held before the State Security Chamber of the Federal Supreme Court fail to meet international fair trial standards. Amnesty International has voiced its concern in particular about the State Security Chamber of the Federal Supreme Court’s lack of an appeals procedure, which prevents defendants from challenging the court’s decision. On 20 December 2016, Amnesty International wrote to the UAE’s Minister of Justice welcoming the new law but expressing concern that unless the new law is accompanied by amendments to the Code of Criminal procedure, specifically with regards to the administration of cases relating to national security and related cases, the introduction of the appeal process will not address the problem of unfair trial in respect of such cases.

Name: Tayseer Salman al-Najjar
Gender m/f: m

Further information on UA: 112/16 Index: MDE 25/5681/2017 Issue Date: 14 February 2017