

URGENT ACTION

ADVOCATES OF POLITICAL REFORM DETAINED IN UAE

Two civil society activists and an economist have been detained in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), apparently linked to their calls for political reform. Their lawyer does not know where they are being held. They are likely to be prisoners of conscience.

Ahmad Mansoor, a blogger associated with Hewar, an online political forum that is blocked by the UAE authorities, was detained on 8 April by a group of plain-clothed security officials from Amn al-Dawla, the UAE's security police, together with two uniformed police. They took him from his home which they then searched, removing computers, books and documents. Hours earlier, before dawn, he had received a visit from men who said they were police and wanted to question him about his car, but he refused to accompany them, suspecting that it was a ruse to detain him. Reports suggest that the UAE authorities are attributing his arrest to an alcohol offence, saying bottles of whisky were found in Ahmed Mansoor's car; however, the real reason for his arrest is believed to be his activism in supporting calls for political and other change in the UAE. The UAE is a confederation of seven emirates whose ruling families do not permit direct elections or political parties.

Fahad Salem al-Shehhi, 38, was arrested at his home in Ajman Emirate at 7 pm on 10 April. He too is associated with the online political forum, Hewar. **Nasser bin Ghaith**, an economist and lecturer at the Abu Dhabi branch of the Sorbonne University in Paris, was also detained on 10 April in Dubai. He too has written articles online advocating political reform in the UAE.

According to three detainees' lawyer, the authorities said they would produce them at a holding centre in Dubai but then failed to do so. There are fears that they may be held by Amn al-Dawla in Abu Dhabi and that they are at risk of torture or other ill-treatment. Their lawyer expressed particular concern for Ahmed Mansoor, who he said had received death threats and told Amnesty International that he, too, had received death threats via Facebook.

PLEASE WRITE IMMEDIATELY in Arabic, English or your own language:

- Expressing concern about the arrest and detention of Ahmad Mansoor, Fahad Salem al-Shehhi and Nasser bin Ghaith, all known peaceful advocates of political reform, and asking to be informed of the reasons for their arrest and their current legal status;
- Calling for the three detainees to be released immediately and unconditionally if, as it appears, they are prisoners of conscience who are being held solely on account of their peaceful expression of their conscientiously held beliefs;
- Urging the authorities to immediately disclose their whereabouts, to ensure that they are protected from torture and other ill-treatment and have access to a lawyer, their families and any medical treatment they might require;
- Calling on the authorities to remove restrictions on the exercise of the right to freedom of expression, association and assembly, in line with international human rights law and standards.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 26 MAY 2011 TO:

Vice-President and Prime Minister
Shaikh Mohammad bin Rashid Al-Maktoum, Co-Chair of the Higher National Security Council,
Office of the Prime Minister
POB 2838, Dubai, UAE
Fax: +971 4 3531974; Email through
web:<http://www.uaepm.ae/en/communicate/index.html> (1st*=Full name;
2nd*=Age;3rd*=Nationality;4th*=Place
of Work;5th*=Email;6th*=Type of

Communication – select "Suggestion";
7th*=Subject;8th*=Message)
Salutation: Your Highness

Minister of Interior
Lt-General Sheikh Saif bin Zayed Al-Nahyan
Minister of Interior
Human Rights Directorate
POB: 398, Abu Dhabi, UAE
Fax: +971 4 3981119

Salutation: Your Excellency

And copies to:
Minister of Foreign Affairs
Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahya
POB 1, Abu Dhabi,
United Arab Emirates
Fax: +971 2 4447766
Salutation: Your Excellency

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

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INTERNATIONAL**



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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The United Arab Emirates is a federation of seven emirates, each governed by an absolute ruler called an amir. The individual emirates do not hold local elections. Instead, a regionally determined and selected National Electoral Committee elects half the members of a consultative body, the 40-person Federal National Council (FNC), which sits in Abu Dhabi. The other 20 are appointed by the president. The term of office is two years. Amongst its limited remit, the FNC can examine and amend federal legislation but not veto it.

On 9 March, over 130 civil and political rights activists in the UAE petitioned the president of the UAE to introduce universal, direct elections for the FNC and to give it legislative powers. Ahmed Mansoor had strongly and openly supported the petition and gave a range of media interviews to support the initiative.

Human Rights Watch, in a statement on 9 April, noted that Ahmed Mansoor is a member of the Middle East and North Africa advisory committee at the organisation and that HRW "honored and recognized his efforts to promote human rights in the Emirates at a news conference in Dubai on January 26." (see: <http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2011/04/09/uae-government-detains-human-rights-defender?print>)

On 11 April, a Dubai police official was quoted in Abu Dhabi's The National newspaper saying that Ahmed Mansoor was detained on the authority of the Federal Prosecutor in connection with a 'criminal case'. However, no details were provided. Amnesty International believes this to be a pretext to legitimise his arrest.

Ahmed Mansoor, like his lawyer, Abdelhamid al-Kumaitli, has received death threats via Facebook. One, according to HRW, was sent on 5 April and stated: "Ahmed Mansoor, you are dead. I swear that I will search for you in every house. I swear to God that I will cut you in pieces ... if I don't slaughter you, my cousins will cut your head, you dog."

Ahmed Mansoor and Fahad al-Shehhi were reportedly active in Hewar, an online political forum which is banned in the UAE. Nasser bin Ghaith is an economics professor at the Abu Dhabi branch of France's Sorbonne University.

Political suspects in the UAE are commonly held incommunicado in undisclosed locations. Those arrested by *Amn al-Dawla* are reportedly often kept in solitary confinement. A few political detainees have been allowed to make brief and limited phone calls to their families.

Political parties do not exist in the UAE; political dissent is not tolerated and there are severe restrictions on freedom of expression and association. Websites have been targeted for closure and their owners prosecuted for defamation.

The use of torture of political detainees has been widely reported. Methods have included sleep deprivation, suspension by the wrists or ankles followed by severe beatings to the soles of the feet and even the use of electric shocks to various parts of the body.

The UN Human Rights Committee has commented that routine prolonged solitary confinement is inconsistent with the obligation on states to ensure prisoners are treated with humanity and with respect for their inherent dignity. (General comment 21/44, 6 April 1992).

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