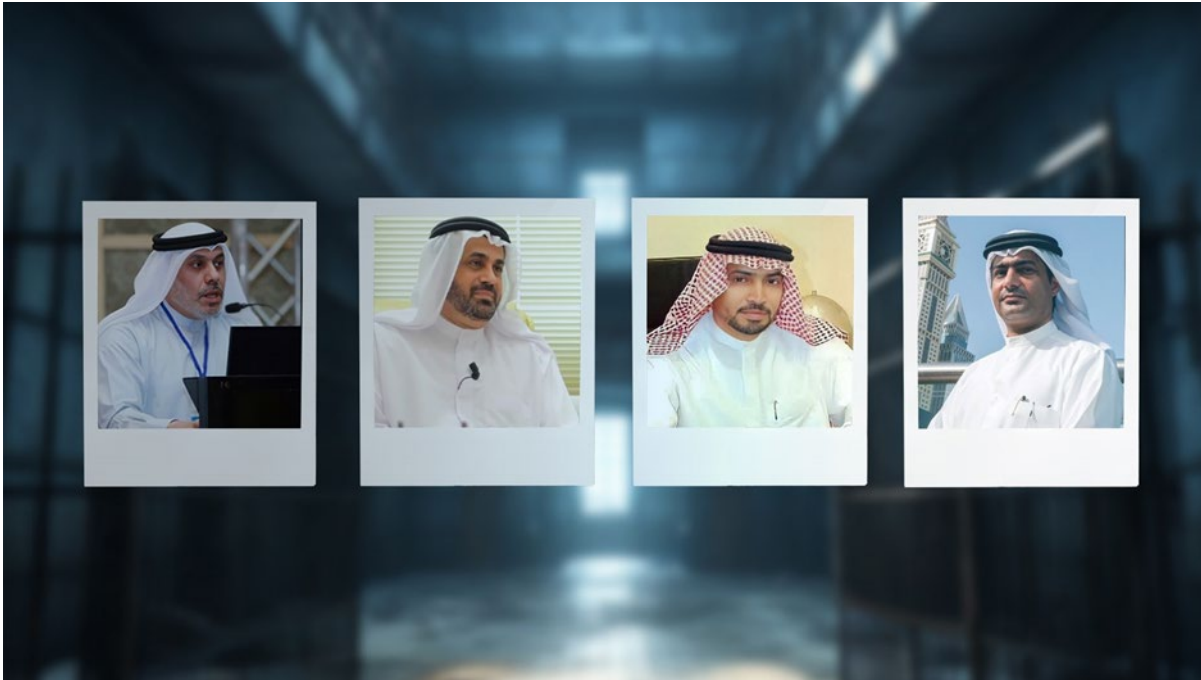


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UNITED ARAB EMIRATES: FREE ALL THOSE ON TRIAL IN UAE84 CASE AND DROP CHARGES

The Emirates Detainees Advocacy Center (EDAC), the Gulf Centre for Human Rights (GCHR), Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch urgently appeal to United Nations special procedures, UN Member States, and the European Union to call on the United Arab Emirates (UAE) to drop recent abusive terrorism charges against at least 84 Emiratis. The defendants include many prisoners previously tried in the mass trial in 2012-2013, the UAE94 case, of whom the majority are now arbitrarily detained past the end of their sentences; GCHR's Board member **Ahmed Mansoor** and academic Dr. **Nasser Bin Ghaith**; as well as others in exile. The case is all the more shocking given that the first hearing began while the UAE was hosting the 28th Conference of Parties (COP28) of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

None of the accused are alleged to have committed any new crimes, but are now on trial in connection with charges related to membership in a group for which they have already been tried. According to the Emirates Detainees Advocacy Center (EDAC), authorities charged 43 of the men with establishing a "terrorist organization" and at least 41 with supporting and funding a "terrorist organization," charges that carry sentences of up to life imprisonment or the death penalty.

On 6 January 2024, the state news agency officially announced the trial and the new charges against the 84 defendants – a month after the first hearing took place – stating that the defendants concealed evidence of the crime of "establishing another clandestine organization for the purpose of committing acts of violence and terrorism" on state territory.

The first hearing was held on 7 December 2023 at the Abu Dhabi Federal Appeal Court. Authorities appointed state attorneys to those whose families had not hired defense lawyers. Defense lawyers were unable to meet with their defendants before the trial, and were thus not able to properly prepare a defense. During the first four trial hearings in this case, authorities reportedly placed the families in a separate room to observe the proceedings on a screen with defective sound; and at the second hearing on 14 December 2023, the sound was cut off, preventing the families from following the proceedings. In addition, some families have not been able to attend the hearings as the authorities have refused to renew their IDs.

The latest hearing was on 7 February 2024 to hear the prosecution's arguments, which refuted claims that the defendants had already been tried for the same charge in 2012-2013.

For the first time, EDAC reports that families of the detainees were allowed to follow the court's proceeding from inside the courtroom. The detainees were leg-shackled throughout the trial session, which lasted from 10 in the morning until 3 in the afternoon. They requested that the next session of the trial, scheduled for 8 February, be postponed due to the arduous length of the hearing and the time needed to transport the defendants to and from prison. The next hearing date has yet to be made clear.

Of the at least 84 defendants, 43 are charged with establishing a terrorist organization and another 41 are charged with supporting and financing it. Ahmed Mansoor, who was arrested on 20 March 2017 and sentenced to 10 years in prison in May 2018, and Dr. Nasser Bin Ghaith, who was sentenced on 29 March 2017 to ten years in prison, are among those accused of supporting this "terrorist" organization.

Should the defendants be convicted, their appeal could go to the highest court, the Federal Supreme Court.

Although the authorities have not made public any documents relating to the case, it is likely that the defendants are being charged pursuant to Federal Law No. 7 of 2014 on Combating Terrorist Offences, which imposes the death penalty or life imprisonment for establishing or heading a terrorist organization and defines terrorism in vague and overly broad terms that can extend to "doing harm to property or the environment, harming the internal or external security of society, hostility to the state, or affecting the state's public authorities ... in the conduct of their work."

Among the 84 people who have been falsely charged with terrorism are at least three exiled Emiratis who had previously been put on a terrorism list, including **Hamad Al-Shamsi**, Executive Director of EDAC, and **Ahmed Al-Shaibah Al-Nuaimi**.

In August 2023, GCHR, EDAC, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and 19 other NGOs issued a joint appeal calling for the release of all detained human rights defenders and activists, including over 60 who had completed their sentences, ahead of COP28 in the UAE.

The majority of the defendants in the current trial who are being held beyond their completed sentences are from the UAE94 mass trial. They include human rights lawyers Dr. **Mohammed Al-Roken** and Dr. **Mohammed Al-Mansoori** and dozens of others who were arrested after signing a 2011 reform petition.

On 19 January 2024, 17 UN Experts issued a statement expressing grave concern that the trial of "84 members of civil society on spurious terrorism charges could result in the death penalty or lengthy prison sentences."

Despite repeated calls by human rights organizations and international mechanisms over the past years, the UAE authorities have not allowed international experts or independent monitors access to Ahmed Mansoor or other human rights defenders in prison. Since July 2023, the authorities have held at least 11 UAE94 defendants in incommunicado detention, and at least one has told the court that he has been held in solitary confinement for a year and half, according to EDAC. Others also complained of being held in solitary confinement and one defendant complained of being beaten daily, leading some to declare they would go on hunger strike to protest their prison conditions. Visits by independent observers would, at least, provide verification of the prisoners' situation and, pending their release, could lead to improving their prison conditions.

Recommendations

Once again, the Emirates Detainees Advocacy Center (EDAC), the Gulf Centre for Human Rights (GCHR), Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch call on the international community, especially governments with close ties to the UAE, such as the United States of America, United Kingdom, and members of the European Union, in addition to all United Nations mechanisms to:

1. Urgently request that the UAE authorities allow them visits to all detained human rights defenders, to independently verify their prison conditions and ensure that they are protected from torture and other ill-treatment, including prolonged and indefinite solitary confinement which can amount to torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment; and pending their release, ensure that they are treated in line with the UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners, including by giving them regular access to their families and lawyers of their choosing, as well as to any medical care they may require; and
2. Call on the UAE authorities to drop the new charges against the 84 men and release them immediately and unconditionally.