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UAE urged to disclose whereabouts of detained man

Amnesty International has called on the United Arab Emirates' authorities to disclose the legal status and whereabouts of a man arrested apparently for expressing support for demonstrators in Egypt and Tunisia.

Former teacher Hassan Mohammed Hassan al-Hammadi, 52, was taken from his home in the city of Khor Fakkan in the Emirate of Sharjah by State Security (Amn al-Dawla) officers on Friday evening, hours after he had reportedly expressed solidarity with the protestors in a speech to a congregation during Friday prayers.

His current place of detention is unknown and his family have not been permitted to see him.

He was moved on Sunday to State Security headquarters in Abu Dhabi after being charged with "disturbing public security", according to some reports, but others suggest he is still being held by State Security in Khor Fakkan.

"Hassan al-Hammadi's arrest and incommunicado detention is particularly worrying in view of previous evidence of torture of detainees held by the Amn al-Dawla," said Malcolm Smart, Amnesty International's director for the Middle East and North Africa.

"The UAE authorities must immediately disclose his whereabouts, ensure he is not tortured or otherwise ill-treated and allow him access to his family and lawyer."

Hassan al-Hammadi formerly worked for the Ministry of Education for 25 years but was transferred to the Ministry of Justice in 2007.

Scores of teachers suspected of holding Islamist views were also transferred out of the education system at the time.

A member of the board of Teachers Association in UAE, he was previously detained for a day on 31 December 2008 for demonstrating in solidarity with the people of the Gaza Strip, then under Israeli military attack.

People arrested by Amn al-Dawla are often held incommunicado and kept in solitary confinement, although some have been allowed to phone their families while in detention.

The UAE authorities maintain strict curbs on freedom of expression and are intolerant of political dissent.

Detainees previously held by Amn al-Dawla have alleged they were tortured by being hung up by the wrists or ankles and beaten on the soles of the feet, subjected to electric shocks, deprived of sleep for long periods and other methods, but such allegations have rarely, if ever, been investigated or resulted in prosecutions of the perpetrators.