

URGENT ACTION

ONE UAE ACTIVIST RELEASED, BUT MORE DETAINED

Fahad Salem al-Shehhi, a civil society activist detained on 10 April, was released on 17 April. However, three bloggers have been detained in the ongoing clampdown in the UAE. They join fellow blogger **Ahmad Mansoor** and economist **Nasser bin Ghaith**, detained on 8 and 10 April, respectively, and are in custody in Abu Dhabi. Amnesty International believes that these five detainees are prisoners of conscience.

Civil society activist, **Fahad Salem al-Shehhi** was released on 17 April after being arrested at his home in Ajman Emirate on 10 April.

However, between 22 and 25 April, bloggers, **Fahad Salim Dalk**, **Hassan Ali al-Khamis** and **Ahmed Abdul Khaleq**, were detained, it is believed in connection with their involvement with the banned UAE *uaehewar.net* online forum. According to a Reuters news report, the Attorney General of the UAE stated on 25 April that the three bloggers, along with **Ahmad Mansoor** and **Nasser bin Ghaith**, were being held in preventive custody and that they are being investigated in connection with acts that threaten national security and for allegedly insulting government leaders. Amnesty International does not have further details about the arrest of the three bloggers.

Activist Ahmad Mansoor, also associated with the *uaehewar.net* forum, was detained on 8 April in Abu Dhabi. According to his lawyer, he was asked why he allowed unspecified statements 'against' the President of the UAE and against national security to be posted online on the Hewart forum. Economist Nasser bin Ghaith was also detained on 10 April in Dubai. He too has written articles online advocating political reform in the UAE. No charges are known to have been brought against them as yet.

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

- Welcome the release of Fahad al-Shehhi;
- Express concern about the arrest and detention of bloggers Fahad Salim Dalk, Hassan Ali al-Khamis, Ahmed Abdul Khaleq, activist Ahmad Mansoor and economist Nasser bin Ghaith, requesting information about the reasons for their arrest and their current legal status;
- Call for the five 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 beliefs;
- Call 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 9 JUNE 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. This is the second update of UA 111/11. Further information: www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE25/002/2011/en

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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 and the next election is scheduled for September 2011. Amongst its limited remit, the FNC can examine and amend federal legislation but not veto it. 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.

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 organization 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 6 April, four UAE non-governmental organisations, the Jurists Association, the UAE Teachers' Association, the al-Shohoh National Heritage, or Folklore Association and the Association of Members of the UAE University Lecturers co-signed a public appeal calling for greater democracy in the country.

On 21 April, following a meeting a few days earlier with its leading members, the Minister of Social Affairs ordered the dissolution of the elected board of the Jurists' Association, citing the 6 April open letter as the reason for the decision. She then appointed, for an initial six-month period, a temporary board of directors. The other co-signatories to the open letter are expected to have meetings with officials between 26-28 April and some have expressed concern that they may also face effective closure by having their boards forcibly removed.

Fahad Salem al-Shehhi, 38, was arrested at his home in Ajman Emirate at 7pm on 10 April and reportedly released on 17 April. A retired military officer from the emirate of Ras al-Khaimah, he is thought to be in ill-health and that he was released for medical reasons. He is the head of the al-Shohoh National Heritage, or Folklore Association.

On 25 April, a Reuters news report from the UAE, citing the attorney general, stated that three bloggers were arrested. These three bloggers have been detained in 'preventive detention' along with for Ahmed Mansoor and Nasser bin Ghaith and are being investigated for inciting "acts that threaten state security and public order", and "insulting the president, vice president and the crown prince of Abu Dhabi".

According to a lawyer for Ahmed Mansoor and Nasser bin Ghaith, the former was not questioned about alcohol reportedly found, unopened, at his house; while neither man was asked about the petition they and many others signed in March 2011.

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 off, you dog."

Unconfirmed reports from the UAE indicate that there is a growing smear campaign against Ahmed Mansoor and another civil society and human rights activist, Dr Mohamed al-Mansoori. Text messages have reportedly been circulated alleging that both men have been disloyal to the UAE; that they are not patriotic and that they have spoken against the President. Another message reportedly urges Emiratis to file complaints with prosecutors' offices against the men.

In 2009 authorities in the UAE told the UN Human Rights Council that dialogue with civil societies was a priority.

Further information on UA: 111/11 Index: MDE 25/003/2011 Issue Date: 28 April 2011

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