

# URGENT ACTION

## DETAINED UAE ACTIVISTS MAY FACE CHARGES

**Civil society activist and blogger, Ahmad Mansoor, and economist Nasser bin Ghaith, have now been questioned in Abu Dhabi by the Public Prosecutor for the UAE's State Security Court. Both detainees were able to have their lawyer present who has confirmed that they have not been tortured or otherwise ill-treated. Fahad Salem al-Shehi, a civil society activist, has not been questioned. Amnesty International believes they are prisoners of conscience.**

On 8 April **Ahmad Mansoor**, a blogger, was detained in Abu Dhabi by a group of plain clothes security officials from *Amn al-Dawla*, the UAE's security police, and two uniformed police. He is associated with Hewar, an online political forum that is blocked by the UAE authorities. They took him from his home which they then searched, removing computers, books and documents. He was questioned by the Public Prosecutor for the UAE's State Security Court on 17 April. 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 Hewar forum. He was also questioned about statements he is alleged to have made urging UAE nationals to boycott forthcoming elections on grounds that this could be considered "incitement to public disorder". However, no charges are known to have been brought against him as yet.

**Nasser bin Ghaith**, an economist and Visiting Lecturer at the Abu Dhabi branch of the Sorbonne University of Paris, was also detained on 10 April in Dubai. He too has written articles online advocating political reform in the UAE. He was interrogated in Abu Dhabi by the Public Prosecutor for the State Security Court on or about 13 April, apparently about statements he is alleged to have made in October 2010 concerning the Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi and Deputy Supreme Commander of the UAE Armed Forces, Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan. He too is not known to have been charged with any offence, at least as yet.

**Fahad Salem al-Shehi**, 38, was arrested at his home in Ajman Emirate at 7pm on 10 April. He too is associated with Hewar online forum and is expected to be questioned in the coming days.

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

- Express concern about the arrest and detention of Ahmad Mansoor, Fahad Salem al-Shehi and Nasser bin Ghaith, and ask to be informed of the reasons for their arrest and their current legal status;
- Call 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 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 1 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.

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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.

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, you dog."

Ahmed Mansoor and Fahad al-Shehhi were reportedly active in Hewar, an online political forum which is banned in the UAE.

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.

The three men are held by Amn al-Dawla, or State Security. Vaguely worded crimes in the UAE Penal Code, classed as state security crimes, are tried in the State Security Court, generally *in camera*. Under the procedures for this court, the trial is held before the Supreme Court and there is no right of appeal.

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).

Further information on UA: 111/11 Index: MDE 25/002/2011 Issue Date: 20 April 2011

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