



September 18, 2015

The Honorable John Kerry
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Kerry,

We are writing to urge you to raise the cases of several human rights defenders in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) during your upcoming meeting with UAE Foreign Minister Abdullah bin Zayed al-Nahyan during your visit to the United Kingdom this weekend.

On 18 August 2015, UAE security forces arrested prominent Emirati academic Dr. Nasser bin Ghaith, reportedly in relation to his recent tweets about Egypt. One month after his arrest, the government still has not provided details concerning his whereabouts. Numerous NGOs have raised concern that he may be at risk of torture and ill treatment while being held incommunicado.

Dr. bin Ghaith has played a prominent role in advocating for political reform and human rights in the UAE. In 2011, bin Ghaith and four other activists sent a petition to the president calling for the introduction of direct elections and more legislative powers for the parliament. Security forces arrested these five activists in April 2011 on charges of insulting the country's leadership and endangering national security. Following a trial before the Federal Supreme Court, the government sentenced them to 2-3 years in prison on 27 November 2011. The next day, however, the president pardoned all five activists. The recent re-arrest and disappearance of Dr. bin Ghaith reflects the increasingly hostile environment for human rights defenders in the UAE. We ask that you urge Foreign Minister al-Nahyan to reveal the whereabouts of Dr. bin Ghaith and ensure his welfare.

Additionally, prominent human rights defender Ahmed Mansoor has faced similar restrictions related to his activism in the country. Mansoor stood trial alongside Dr. bin Ghaith in 2011 as part of the same group of activists. Since his pardon in 2011, he has remained one of the few Emiratis who continue to speak out on human rights violations in the nation. He has called attention to the case of "The 94," a group of political prisoners who were subjected to a 2013 mass trial on charges related to free speech, as well as instances of enforced disappearance and arbitrary detention that have been occurring with increasing frequency in the UAE.

The Government of the UAE currently maintains a travel ban on Mansoor, who is a finalist for this year's Martin Ennals Award for Human Rights Defenders. The ceremony will take place in Geneva on 6 October 2015, and Mansoor will likely not be able to attend. We respectfully request that you ask the Government of the UAE to lift the travel ban on Mansoor so that he may attend the ceremony and receive recognition for his important work in the UAE.

Recently promulgated laws have enabled the UAE to persecute activists like bin Ghaith and Mansoor with ease. The 2014 Law on Combating Terrorist Offenses allows the government to imprison anyone who commits an action that “prejudices the national unity” or declares “opposition to the state.” Further, a 2012 law on combating cybercrimes similarly allows the government to imprison anyone who publishes online information that damages national unity, social peace, or the reputation of the state. These laws have empowered the government to arrest anyone who speaks out with impunity, as recent arrests of political prisoners’ family members, including the al-Suwaidi sisters and Osama al-Najjer, have demonstrated.

We urge you to raise these cases during your meeting with the foreign minister and ask that the Government of the UAE stop misapplying these laws to restrict legitimate and peaceful expression. As President Obama stated at the White House Summit on Countering Violent Extremism this past February, “lasting stability and real security require democracy. That means free elections where people can choose their own future, and independent judiciaries that uphold the rule of law, and police and security forces that respect human rights, and free speech and freedom for civil society groups.”

Respectfully,

Husain Abdulla, Executive Director
Americans for Democracy & Human Rights in Bahrain

Brian Dooley, Director of Human Rights Defenders Program
Human Rights First