



Mr. President,

Americans for Democracy & Human Rights in Bahrain welcomes the report of the Special Rapporteur and shares his concern regarding the abuse of modern surveillance laws. Across the Arab Gulf states, we have seen a marked expansion of the legal framework in which individuals may be monitored and prosecuted for the creation and dissemination of personal information.

In Bahrain, the government has amended a wide array of legislation – including cybercrime and anti-terror laws – to authorize increased surveillance and to criminalize acts of free expression. Officials have used these laws to target journalists, activists, and human rights defenders, like Nabeel Rajab, the president of the Bahrain Center for Human Rights. Rajab currently faces up to 18 years in prisons on charges relating to tweets, media interviews and editorials. The authorities have also prosecuted individuals for “misusing a telecommunications appliance.” Ironically, this charge was filed against human rights lawyer Mohamed al-Tajer, who in a private WhatsApp group, called other members of the group to exercise restraint on making comments critical of the government, due to the danger of authorities intercepting their communications.

Similarly, in the UAE, broad cybercrime and anti-terror legislation are combined with a massive domestic surveillance infrastructure that enables the government to track and target all forms of dissent. After a prolonged period of enforced disappearance, UAE authorities are currently prosecuting academic Nasser bin Ghaith for tweets in which he criticized the Emirati and Egyptian governments.

Likewise, in Saudi Arabia, security forces also arrest human rights defenders, journalists, and dissidents under cybercrime and anti-terror laws designed to restrict free expression. Writer Raif Badawi remains in prison on charges related solely to his online blog.

In the context of these severe and increasing violations of the rights to privacy and freedom of expression, we wish to ask the Rapporteur: “How can cybercrime and anti-terror legislation be amended so as to ensure privacy and other basic human rights are protected?”

Thank you