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**Human rights situations that require the Council's attention**

## **Written statement\* submitted by Americans for Democracy & Human Rights in Bahrain Inc, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status**

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[31 May 2019]

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\* Issued as received, in the language(s) of submission only.

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## The United Arab Emirates and Human Rights abuses against Prisoners

Americans for Democracy & Human Rights in Bahrain (ADHRB) takes this opportunity at the 41<sup>st</sup> Session of the United Nations (UN) Human Rights Council (HRC) to raise serious concerns over human rights abuses committed by United Arab Emirates (UAE) officials against prisoners in the United Arab Emirates and in Yemeni prisoners controlled by the United Arab Emirates or United Arab Emirates-backed forces. We are particularly concerned about violations of free expression, unlawful arrests, enforced disappearances, arbitrary detention following unfair trials, and torture.

## Prosecution of Human Rights Defenders and Intellectuals

On 20 March 2017, human rights defender Ahmed Mansoor was arrested from his home in a pre-dawn raid.<sup>1</sup> He was held for over a year in pre-trial detention until the State Security Chamber of the Federal Appeals Court sentenced him on 29 May 2018 to ten years in prison and fined him more than 1 million dirhams on charges of “insulting the ‘status and prestige of the United Arab Emirates’ and its rulers” and publishing false reports on social media aiming to harm the country’s relations with neighboring countries.<sup>2</sup> These charges stem from his human rights work and public criticism of the United Arab Emirates. His sentence was upheld on 31 December 2018,<sup>3</sup> and since then he reportedly has been held in solitary confinement in a small cell with no bed or water. In March 2019, Mansoor began a hunger strike to protest those conditions. On 7 May 2019, the UN Special Rapporteur on torture and six other UN human rights experts condemned this situation, noting that those conditions may amount to torture.<sup>4</sup> However, as of late May 2019, he remains detained in these conditions.

Ahmed Mansoor is only one of many individuals arrested for questioning the authorities, calling for freedom of expression, or criticizing the United Arab Emirates’s role in the war in Yemen. Arrested dissidents are frequently forcibly disappeared, denied access to legal counsel before trial, tortured, kept in solitary confinement, and coerced into confessing. Despite allegations of such abuse, courts routinely ignore or deny defendants’ claims.<sup>5</sup>

For example, on 2 July 2013, the Special Security Court within the Federal Supreme Court in Abu Dhabi tried 94 intellectuals, activists, and human rights defenders, some of whom were linked to the Reform and Social Guidance Association (al-Islah), a peaceful organization calling for political reform that the government claims has links to Egypt’s Muslim Brotherhood.<sup>6</sup> The court convicted 69 defendants on charges of founding, organizing, and administering an organization aimed at overthrowing the government and sentenced them to lengthy prison terms. The court denied them of the right to appeal the

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<sup>1</sup> Press Release, UN rights experts urge UAE: “Immediately release Human Rights Defender Ahmed Mansoor”, OHCHR (Mar. 28, 2017), <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=21449&LangID=E>.

<sup>2</sup> “United Arab Emirates: Shocking 10-year sentence for award-winning activist Ahmed Mansoor for Twitter posts is a devastating blow to human rights,” Gulf Centre for Human Rights, 30 May 2018, <https://www.gc4hr.org/news/view/1875>.

<sup>3</sup> Gulf Centre for Human Rights, *United Arab Emirates: A look inside Ahmed Mansoor’s isolation cell after two years in prison*, GC4HR (May 18, 2019), <https://www.gc4hr.org/news/view/2133>.

<sup>4</sup> Press Release, UAE: UN experts condemn conditions of detention for jailed activist Ahmed Mansoor, OHCHR (May 7, 2019), <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=24571&LangID=E&fbclid=IwAR22NPue4IVgNOAz3QvR3CsMuFAyy1zzfPOH9PshHRVt9PK4czLrWzCwBDc>.

<sup>5</sup> Bill Law, *Ahmed Mansoor: Why we must not allow a brave man to be silenced by the UAE*, Middle East Eye (Mar. 21, 2017), <https://www.middleeasteye.net/opinion/ahmed-mansoor-why-we-must-not-allow-brave-man-be-silenced-uae>.

<sup>6</sup> Amnesty International, *UAE: Ruthless crackdown on dissent exposes ‘ugly reality’ beneath façade of glitz and glamour* (Nov. 18, 2014), <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2014/11/uae-ruthless-crackdown-dissent-exposes-ugly-reality-beneath-fa-ade-glitz-and-glamour/>.

judgment.<sup>7</sup> During the trial, the government did not allow independent observatory bodies or members of the international media to attend the proceedings. After their convictions, the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention found their detention to be in violation of their rights to freedom of association, freedom of expression, and fair trial rights.<sup>8</sup>

## Women in United Arab Emirates Prisons

In 2015, United Arab Emirates security officials raided Alia Abdulnoor's house. They detained, blindfolded, shackled, interrogated and kept her in solitary confinement without informing her of the charges against her. Abdulnoor was forced to sign a confession she could not read that was later used against her in court. In May 2017, Abdulnoor was sentenced to ten years in prison for "financing terrorism," a charge relating to assisting in fundraising for Syrian families in the United Arab Emirates and for women and children affected by the war in the Syrian Arab Republic. While in prison officials beat Abdulnoor and denied her adequate medical treatment for her breast cancer.

On 19 November 2015, Amina Ahmed Saeed Al-Abdouli was detained without a warrant and held in a secret location for seven and a half months before being transferred to Al-Wathba prison. She was charged with "inciting hatred against the State and disturbing public order," and was sentenced to five years in prison on charges of tweeting about her father's death in Syria. While in custody, she was insulted, tortured, and threatened with losing custody over her children. As a result of continuous beatings, Al-Abdouli started losing sight in her left eye due to continuous beating. However she was not provided with the adequate medical treatment.<sup>9</sup>

Similarly, Maryam Suliman Al-Balushi, 21 years old, was charged with "financing terrorism" for donating to a Syrian family. During her detention in a secret detention center, Al-Balushi was repeatedly beaten and threatened with rape. While in prison, authorities kept Al-Balushi under constant surveillance, by placing cameras in her bathroom in order to humiliate her.<sup>10</sup>

On 12 February 2019, three UN experts sent an Urgent Appeal<sup>11</sup> to the United Arab Emirates expressing concern over the alleged torture and ill treatment of Abdulnoor, Al-Abdouli, and Al-Balushi. The experts called on the authorities to investigate and report on these cases, to hold the perpetrators accountable, and to provide factual and legal grounds for the detention of these women.<sup>12</sup> Later, the experts called for Abdulnoor's release on medical grounds.<sup>13</sup> The authorities did not release Abdulnoor and she died in custody on 4 May 2019.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>7</sup> FIDH, *United Arab Emirates: Criminalising Dissent – UAE 94 Trial Deeply Flawed*, (Aug. 2013) [https://www.fidh.org/IMG/pdf/report\\_uae94\\_uk.pdf](https://www.fidh.org/IMG/pdf/report_uae94_uk.pdf).

<sup>8</sup> Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, Opinion No. 60/2013 concerning 61 individuals (United Arab Emirates) (Apr. 2, 2014), U.N. Doc. A/HRC/WGAD/2013/60.

<sup>9</sup> Urgent Appeal to the Government of the United Arab Emirates, U.N. Ref. No. UA ARE 2/2019 (Feb. 12, 2019).

<sup>10</sup> Americans for Democracy & Human Rights in Bahrain, *UPDATED: UN Special Procedures Publishes Urgent Appeal on the Ill Treatment of Female Detainees at the UAE Al-Wathba prison*, ADHRB (May 2, 2019), <https://www.adhrb.org/2019/05/un-special-procedures-publishes-urgent-appeal-on-the-ill-treatment-of-female-detainees-at-the-uae-al-wathba-prison/>.

<sup>11</sup> Urgent Appeal to the Government of the United Arab Emirates, *supra* n. 10.

<sup>12</sup> *Id.*

<sup>13</sup> Press Release, UAE: Terminally ill prisoner, Alia Abdulnoor, must be released to "live final days in dignity", say experts, OHCHR (Feb. 26, 2019), <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=24214&LangID=E>.

<sup>14</sup> International Centre for Justice and Human Rights, *Alya Abdulnoor Died in Custody after UAE Authorities Refused to Release Her on Medical Grounds*, IC4JHR (May 6, 2019), <http://www.ic4jhr.org/en/2014-11-30-18-36-45/media/1020-alya-abdulnoor-died-in-custody-after-uae-authorities-refused-to-release-her-on-medical-grounds.html>.

## United Arab Emirates' involvement in the war in Yemen

On 17 August 2018, the Group of Eminent Experts (GEE) released its first report examining allegations of human rights violations committed by all parties to the conflict in Yemen.<sup>15</sup> Among the abuses the report documents is torture by Emirati forces. The report found that in the areas where pro-government forces maintained control, coalition-backed forces – including United Arab Emirates personnel – were empowered to fill the void of the criminal judicial system, resulting in widespread arbitrary detention.

The GEE noted that “[h]undreds of individuals have been detained for perceived opposition to the Government or to the [United Arab Emirates].” The GEE also called attention to 2017 reports of “violations committed in detention facilities or undeclared centres under the control of the United Arab Emirates.” The experts investigated allegations of sexual violence, including rape of adult male detainees by United Arab Emirates personnel. At the Bureiqa facility, “detainees described being interrogated while naked, bound and blindfolded, sexually assaulted and raped.” At Bir Ahmed prison, United Arab Emirates forces “raided the facility and perpetrated sexual violence.” In March 2018, nearly 200 detainees were forced to strip naked while United Arab Emirates personnel forcibly examined them, with multiple detainees reporting rape and sodomy.

Amnesty International additionally reported on widespread violations committed by the United Arab Emirates in Yemen, stating that United Arab Emirates forces “have been carrying out arbitrary arrests unlawfully depriving individuals of their liberty and engaging in enforced disappearances, torture, and other ill-treatment.” Significantly, Amnesty International documented a network of secret prisons run by the United Arab Emirates, where security forces act with impunity.<sup>16</sup>

## Conclusion and recommendations

ADHRB calls on Members of the Council to pressure the United Arab Emirates to end mistreatment and torture in prison, especially human rights defenders, activists, and intellectuals. We further urge Members to call for the end to enforced disappearances, arbitrary arrests, torture and unfair trials. In addition, we ask Members to push the United Arab Emirates for accountability for its abuses in Yemen, and we urge the Council to continue to support the work of the GEE.

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<sup>15</sup> U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights, Situation of human rights in Yemen, including violations and abuses since September 2014, U.N. Doc. A/HRC/39/43 (Aug. 17, 2018).

<sup>16</sup> “God Only Knows If He’s Alive: Enforced disappearance and detention violations in southern Yemen,” Amnesty International, 12 July 2018, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde31/8682/2018/en/>.