

Date: 16 October 2019

OPEN LETTER TO THE EMIRATI AUTHORITIES TO FREE HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDER AHMED MANSOOR ON HIS 50TH BIRTHDAY

Your Excellency, Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed al Nahyan,

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) has recently announced multiple projects promoting pluralism and tolerance both at home and abroad. 2019 has been declared the 'Year of Tolerance' and in 2020, Dubai will host the World Expo trade fair, under the theme 'Connecting Minds, Creating the Future.' Upon Dubai's selection for this exhibition in 2013, Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al-Maktoum, Vice President and Ruler of Dubai, said: "[w]e renew our promise to astonish the world in 2020." We welcome these public commitments to tolerance and open-mindedness.

It is in this same spirit that we, the undersigned, call upon the UAE government to immediately and unconditionally release human rights defender Ahmed Mansoor, whose life we believe may be at risk following beatings and hunger strikes to protest deplorable and inhumane prison conditions. The Authorities have convicted and imprisoned him solely for his human rights work and for exercising his right to freedom of expression, which is also protected under the UAE's Constitution. Amnesty International considers him to be a prisoner of conscience.

Before his imprisonment, Mansoor was known as 'the last human rights defender left in the UAE' on account of his fearless work to document human rights violations in the country. His willingness to speak out publicly in defence of human rights on his blog, via social media and in interviews with international media was an example to us all. He is also an engineer, a poet, and a father of four. He is on the advisory boards of the Gulf Centre for Human Rights (GCHR) and Human Rights Watch and was awarded the 2015 Martin Ennals Award for Human Rights Defenders.

UAE authorities arrested Mansoor on 20 March 2017 at his home and subjected him to enforced and involuntary disappearance for over six months, with no access to a lawyer and sparse contact with his family, who did not know his exact whereabouts. The authorities held him in solitary confinement for prolonged periods of time.

Shortly after his arrest, a group of United Nations human rights experts said that the UAE should release him immediately, describing his arrest as "a direct attack on the legitimate work of human rights defenders in the UAE." They expressed fear that his arrest "may constitute an act of reprisal for his engagement with UN human rights mechanisms, for the views he expressed on social media, including Twitter."

A year later, on 29 May 2018, Mansoor was sentenced under vague charges of "insulting the status and prestige of the UAE and its symbols, including its leaders", "publishing false information to damage the UAE's reputation abroad" and "portraying the UAE as a lawless land." He received a sentence of 10 years in prison, a fine of 1,000,000 UAE Dirhams (US\$272,000), three years of probation after completion of his sentence, and confiscation of his electronic devices. On 31 December 2018, the State Security Chamber of the Federal Supreme Court upheld his conviction and sentence.

The UAE's Government actions against Mansoor have been widely criticised. For instance, on 4 October 2018, the European Parliament adopted a resolution condemning Mansoor's "harassment, persecution and detention, and calling for his release." In May 2019, after he ended a month-long hunger strike to protest his unjust conviction and his detention conditions in Al-Sadr prison, a group of UN Special Rapporteurs stated that his conditions of detention "violate[d] basic international human rights standards and risk[ed] taking an irrevocable toll on Mr Mansoor's health." In September 2019, Mansoor was severely beaten for continuing his protests and he undertook yet another hunger strike. Nevertheless, he continues to be held in an isolation cell with no running water or bed and is not permitted to leave his cell except for family visits.

In September 2019, the annual report of the UN Secretary General about reprisals against those who cooperate with the UN mechanisms cited Mansoor's case. This was the fourth time that the Secretary General had denounced reprisals against him, having previously raised concerns in 2014, 2017 and 2018.

It is a tragedy and a disgrace for the UAE that this Tuesday, on 22 October of the UAE's 'Year of Tolerance', Ahmed Mansoor will turn 50, alone in a prison cell in such deplorable conditions, simply for exercising his fundamental right to free speech and for speaking out against human rights violations.

Mansoor's imprisonment is part of a larger and growing pattern of repression in the UAE. Since 2011, the authorities have embarked on an unprecedented campaign of repression on freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association in the country, shrinking the space for peaceful dissent to near-obliteration. Authorities have used privately manufactured technologies, such as those made by NSO Group, for the unlawful targeted surveillance of human rights defenders, including Mansoor, in order to monitor and clamp down on dissent. The authorities have arrested, detained, and prosecuted activists, human rights defenders and other critics of the government, including prominent lawyers, judges and academics, on broad and sweeping national security-related or cybercrime charges and in proceedings that fail to meet international fair trial standards.

The UAE has publicly declared itself a champion of tolerance in the Middle East and the world. Under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, it has an obligation to protect the rights of its citizens and residents. For this reason, we call upon the UAE government to uphold these principles, and to release Ahmed Mansoor without further delay.

Signatories:

1. A Common Future- Cameroon
2. Abraham's Children Foundation- Nigeria
3. ACAPE BURUNDI
4. Action by Christians for the Abolition of Torture (ACAT)-Belgium
5. ACAT-Germany
6. ACAT-Liberia
7. ACAT-Switzerland
8. Access Center for Human Rights-France
9. Access Now
10. Accountabilitylab- Niger
11. African Monitoring Observatory on Climate, Waters, Earth, and Cultures (AMOClimWEC)- Benin
12. American Association of University Professors - New York University Chapter
13. American Association of University Professors (AAUP)
14. Americans for Democracy & Human Rights in Bahrain (ADHRB)
15. Amis des Etrangers au Togo (ADET)- Togo
16. Amman Center for Human Rights Studies- Jordan
17. Amnesty International
18. Angels in the Field- India
19. Arabic Network for Human Rights Information (ANHRI)
20. ARTICLE 19
21. Asociación de Tecnología, Educación, Desarrollo, Investigación, Comunicación (TEDIC)- Paraguay
22. Association de defense des libertes individuelles- Tunisia
23. Association For Promotion Sustainable Development- India
24. Association for Victims of Torture in UAE- Switzerland
25. Badhon Manob Unnayan Sangstha- Bangladesh
26. Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (CIHRS)
27. Center for Civil Liberties- Ukraine
28. Center for Innovative and Pragmatic Development Initiative (CIPDI)
29. Centre d'Appui a l'Education et au Developpement Communautaire (CEDECO)- Democratic Republic of the Congo

30. Centre for Social Mobilization and Sustainable Development - Ghana
31. Centro de Estudios y apoyo al desarrollo Local- Bolivia
32. CIVICUS
33. Comision Nacional de los Derechos Humanos- Dominican Republic
34. Committee for the Respect of Liberties and Human Rights in Tunisia
35. Community Initiative for Social Empowerment (CISE)- Malawi
36. Community Uplift and Welfare Development (CUWEDE)- Uganda
37. Conacce Chaplains- Colombia
38. Construisons Ensemble le Monde Democratic Republic of the Congo
39. Coordination Maghrébine des Organisations des Droits Humains- Morocco
40. Daniel Iroegbu Global Health Foundation- Nigeria
41. Educating Girls and Young Women for Development- Zambia
42. English PEN
43. European Centre for Democracy and Human Rights (ECDHR)
44. FINESTE- Haiti
45. Fraternity Foundation for Human Rights- Germany
46. Freedom Forum- Nepal
47. Freedom Now- Morocco
48. Front Line Defenders
49. Fundacion CELTA- Venezuela
50. Fundación Regional de Asesoría en Derechos Humanos (INREDH)- Ecuador
51. Fundacion TEA Trabajo Educacion Ambiente- Argentina
52. Future Leaders Network Gambia Chapter- Gambia
53. Geneva Council for Rights and Liberties- Switzerland
54. Global Learning for Sustainability- Uganda
55. Global Participe- Congo
56. Global Vision- Democratic Republic of the Congo
57. Global Youth on the Quest for Developmental Networking- Gambia
58. Gulf Centre for Human Rights (GCHR)
59. Gulf Institute for Democracy and Human Rights (GIDHR)- Australia
60. HOPE Worldwide-Pakistan- New Zealand
61. Human Rights Defenders Network (ACPDH)- Burundi
62. Human Rights First
63. Human Rights Foundation
64. Human Rights Watch
65. Humena for Human Rights and Civic Engagement- Egypt
66. Hunger Reduction International- Somalia
67. IFEX

68. Innovation for Change - Middle East and North Africa
69. International Campaign for Freedom in the United Arab Emirates (ICFUAE)
70. International Center for Supporting Rights and Freedoms- Switzerland
71. International Centre for Justice and Human Rights- Switzerland
72. International Commission of Jurists (ICJ)
73. International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), under the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders
74. International Legal Initiative- Kazakhstan
75. International Service for Human Rights (ISHR)
76. International Youth Alliance for Peace- Sri Lanka
77. Iraqi Network for Social Media (INSM)- Iraq
78. Jeunesse Assistance- Niger
79. Justice Access Point- Uganda
80. Kaimbu Sex Workers Association- Kenya
81. Kazakhstan International Bureau for Human Rights and the Rule of Law- Kazakhstan
82. Legal Clinic Adilet- Kyrgyzstan
83. Liberia Freedom of Information Coalition- Liberia
84. Ligue Burundaise pour les Droits de la Femme- Burundi
85. Maharat Foundation- Lebanon
86. Martin Ennals Foundation- Switzerland
87. MENA Rights Group
88. Middle East Studies Association of North America
89. Most at Risk Populations in Uganda (MARPS)
90. National Campaign for Sustainable Development- Nepal
91. National Sudanese Women Association - Sudan
92. Norwegian PEN- Norway
93. Omani Association for Human Rights
94. Organisation Marocaine des Droits Humains (OMDH)- Morocco
95. Pakistan NGOs Forum- Pakistan
96. Palestinian Center for Communication and Development Strategies- Palestine
97. Participatory Research Action Network (PRAN)- Bangladesh
98. PEN America
99. PEN Canada
100. PEN International
101. PEN Iraq
102. Plateforme d'Autonomisation des organisations de jeunesses de Côte d'ivoire (Paajci)- Cote D'Ivoire
103. Promo-LEX Association- Moldova
104. Qurium Media Foundation- Sweden
105. Reconciliation and Development Agency- Cameroon

106. Reporters Without Borders (RSF)
107. Resilient Youth for Change- Zambia
108. Rights Realization Centre
109. Rise Initiative for Human Advocacy- South Sudan
110. Rotel Foundation for Social Development- Nigeria
111. Rukiga Forum for Development (RUFODE)- Uganda
112. Rural Development Foundation- Pakistan
113. Salam for Democracy and Human Rights
114. Scholars at Risk
115. Sentinel for Human Rights
116. Sierra Leone School Green Clubs- Sierra Leone
117. Society for Rural Women and Youth Development- Nigeria
118. SPEDYA-Africa- Togo
119. Street Children Empowerment Foundation- Ghana
120. Sukaar Welfare Organization- Pakistan
121. Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression (SCM)
122. Terres des Jeunes- Togo
123. TRIO Uganda- United Kingdom
124. Tunisian Association For Supporting Minority Rights- Tunisia
125. Tunisian League of Defending Human Rights- Tunisia
126. Union des Frères pour Alternatif de Développement Intégré (UFADI)- Haiti
127. Urnammu for Justice and Human Rights- Canada
128. Veritas Collective Foundation- Pakistan
129. Vigilance for Democracy and the Civic State- Tunisia
130. Vijana Hope- Democratic Republic of the Congo
131. Volunteers Welfare for Community Based Care of Zambia- Zambia
132. Wales PEN Cymru
133. Women's March Global
134. World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT), under the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders
135. Young Men Association- Botswana
136. Youth Action for Relentless Development Organization- Sierra Leone
137. Youth Advocacy Nepal- Nepal
138. Youth for the Mission- Jamaica
139. Youth Harvest Foundation- Ghana
140. YOUTH AID- Liberia