



# General Assembly

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## Human Rights Council

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Agenda item 3

**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,  
political, economic, social and cultural rights,  
including the right to development**

## **Written statement\* submitted by Alsalam Foundation, 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 2021]

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



## **Systematic Human Rights Violations in the United Arab Emirates**

### **The United Arab Emirates' Violations Against Human Right Defenders**

UAE authorities display a dangerous disregard for the rule of law. They do this by conducting arbitrary and incommunicado detentions, especially against dissidents and human rights defenders; ignoring due process rights and carrying out flawed trials; using tactics of torture, physical and sexual abuse, and other inhuman treatment on detained individuals; and denying other basic human rights to incarcerated dissidents, like access to adequate medical care and family visits. In October 2018, the European Parliament adopted a resolution calling on the UAE to stop all forms of judicial harassment vis-a-vis HRDs, and to guarantee their ability to carry out legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals. However, dozens of political prisoners continue to languish in detention. The most well-known example of the imprisonment of dissidents was the case of the "UAE 94," a mass trial of human rights lawyers, judges, and student activists that occurred in 2013.

In 2019, renowned human rights defender Ahmed Mansoor was sentenced to a 10-year prison sentence for "insulting the status and prestige of the UAE and its symbols including its leaders." In fact, this was in reprisal for his peaceful human rights activism, for which he has received numerous recognitions. Since his arrest in 2017, he has been held in solitary confinement and only been permitted to leave his cell a handful of times.

Other high-profile imprisoned individuals include lawyer and human rights defender Dr. Mohammed Al-Roken, detained since 2012 and sentenced to 10 years as one of the UAE-94 for signing a petition calling for political reform; prominent academic Nasser bin-Ghaith, whom authorities forcibly disappeared in August 2015 for his peaceful criticism of Emirati and Egyptian authorities; Maryam al-Balushi and Amina al-Abdouli, two prominent women human rights defenders. Furthermore, the International Campaign for Freedom in the UAE (ICFUA) reports that:

The UAE has consistently failed to release political prisoners at the end of their sentences. Indefinite detention is primarily facilitated by the country's draconian anti-terror legislation, which uses ambiguous criteria to force political prisoners into 'counselling centres' once their prison sentences are complete. Officially used to 'guide and reform' those convicted of terrorist offences these "counselling centres" are increasingly employed as a political tool to silence dissent, under the pretext that political prisoners pose a "threat" to the state and society.

As of December 2020, at least 14 political prisoners were being detained indefinitely.

In 2019, a Reuters investigation exposed the UAE's involvement in "Project Raven," an initiative in which former US intelligence operatives reportedly helped the UAE keep individuals, including human rights activists, under surveillance across the globe with no judicial oversight. This shows that the UAE will stop at nothing to surveil and silence dissidents.

### **The UAE's Legal Discrimination against Women and Minority Groups**

#### **Women**

Despite recent reforms made on women's rights, de facto and/or de jure discrimination and violence toward women still exist. For example, a March 2020 law that prohibits domestic violence still allows a male guardian to discipline their wives, female relatives, and children; furthermore, marital rape is still not criminalized and "honor" killings of women are still not properly prosecuted. Other personal status laws also remain. Citizenship laws still exclude Emirati women from passing their nationality to their children.

## **Migrant Workers**

Migrant workers account for more than 90% percent of the UAE's population, but they remain vulnerable to labor abuse particularly because of the kafala (visa-sponsorship) system. Labor laws exclude domestic workers, the majority of whom are women, and many workers—especially in the construction industry—work in dangerous conditions, leading to many deaths each year. Migrant workers face a range of abuses, including unpaid wages, workdays of up to 21 hours with no breaks, physical or sexual assault by employers, prolonged workweeks, no holiday or sick days, among other concerning violations of human rights.

## **Conclusions and Recommendations**

International organizations have repeatedly shared concerns about the UAE's blatant disregard for its obligations under international human rights law, IHL, as well as its own national laws. The UAE has little regard for the preservation of democracy and the rule of law, respect for the wellbeing of its citizens, nor for the lives of individuals abroad in countries such as Yemen. Rather than investing in genuine reforms, authorities have adopted an international public relations strategy of whitewashing their systematic and inhuman treatment of political dissidents, human rights defenders, and other minorities.

The UAE must be held accountable by the international community, and accountability must start at the pinnacle of international human rights bodies: the HRC.

Alsalam calls on the HRC, its accompanying treaty bodies, and the international community to:

- Publicly condemn the Government of the United Arab Emirates for its perpetration of human rights violations;
- Request and carry out Special Rapporteur (SR) visits in the UAE to investigate allegations of torture and inhuman treatment of prisoners of conscience, as well as discriminatory treatment of women and minority groups;
- Seek for justice for those affected by human rights and humanitarian violations in Yemen by considering prosecution at the highest levels of justice;
- Use bilateral and multilateral channels of influence to create a new paradigm for human rights in the UAE.

We further call on the Government of the United Arab Emirates to:

- Immediately and unconditionally release all political prisoners, HRDs, and other wrongfully imprisoned individuals, and end the practice of imprisoning dissidents and HRDs, as well as the practice of indefinite detention;
- Provide reparations for those who were wrongfully imprisoned, and those who were tortured or received other inhuman treatment while in the custody of UAE authorities;
- Accept visits by SRs and provide them with full access to all aspects of UAE society on their visits;
- Identify ways in which the legal, judicial, and political systems in the UAE perpetrate human rights violations and then institute reforms;
- Immediately cease all activities in Yemen;
- Hold accountable all fighting forces that have committed grave violations of IHL in Yemen;
- Provide reparations for victims of abuse and human rights violations perpetrated by UAE-sponsored forces in Yemen.