

Rt Hon David Cameron MP
Prime Minister
10 Downing Street
London
SW1A 2AA

April 25, 2013

Dear Prime Minister,

We are writing to urge you to express the UK government's grave concern in relation to human rights abuses in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) when you meet the country's president, Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan, in the course of his forthcoming state visit to the United Kingdom.

The UAE's discriminatory and disproportionate response to peaceful criticism, its severe violations of due process and fair trial rights, and credible reports of torture – including the alleged torture of three British nationals – warrants a strong response from the UK government.

President Khalifa Al Nahyan's visit to the UK occurs while 94 critics of the government remain on trial on charges that they "launched, established, and ran an organisation seeking to oppose the basic principles of the UAE system of governance and to seize power." According to the information available, the undersigned organizations believe that the conduct of the 94 was peaceful.

Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International and [other rights groups](#) have all found the administration of justice in the trial to be [fundamentally unfair](#). Many of the detainees were held incommunicado for over six months of pre-trial detention and were denied access to their lawyers for the majority of that period.

Based on information from local sources in the UAE, we believe many of the defendants were detained at UAE State Security facilities, where rights groups have documented and continue to receive credible reports of torture. Authorities harassed and intimidated lawyers who sought to offer legal representation to the detainees and did not provide [defence lawyers](#) with the documents setting out the charges against the accused, or the evidence on which these charges are based, until the start of the trial. This severely compromised their ability to mount an effective defence.

The detainees include the prominent lawyers and human rights defenders Mohamed al-Roken and Mohamed al-Mansoori (doctoral graduates of Warwick and Glasgow Universities respectively), judge Mohammed Saeed al-Abdouli, university professor Dr.Hadef al-Owais, as well as other judges, lawyers, teachers and student leaders.

Most of the detainees are members of a local group, the Reform and Social Guidance Association (*Al-Islah*), which advocates greater adherence to Islamic precepts. None of the signatories to this letter are aware of any evidence that the group, which has engaged in peaceful political debate in the UAE for many years, has advocated or participated in violence.

UAE authorities compounded these serious pre-trial violations of due process by arbitrarily denying family members, international observers and the international media access to the trial on spurious procedural grounds.

On April 8 2013, a court in Abu Dhabi jailed Abdallah al-Hadidi, the son of one of the 94 defendants, for 10 months for posting information about the trial on social media, claiming that he published, in bad faith, false details of a public trial session. Human rights groups have expressed concern over this and other aspects of the overall [case](#).

Abdallah Al-Hadidi was present in court during the first two trial sessions on March 4 and 11 and published a series of comments on Twitter describing what he witnessed. These included questioning why the judge had prevented the defendants from communicating with their lawyers during the trial sessions, why defence lawyers were not granted sufficient time to question prosecution witnesses and why the judge refused to investigate the defendants' allegations of torture in pre-trial detention.

In 2007 Amnesty International documented credible allegations of torture at state security facilities in the [UAE](#). With analogous reports documented by [Human Rights Watch](#) in 2012, we fear that despite acceding to the United Nations Convention Against Torture in June 2012, the use of torture in the UAE may continue, and further that those carrying it out are not subject to independent and impartial investigations. Many of the defendants in the ongoing mass trial have told the court that they were seriously ill-treated during months in detention, including prolonged solitary confinement, exposure to continuous fluorescent lighting that made it difficult to sleep, inadequate heating, and hooding when they were taken from their cells, including while being taken to the toilet or for interrogation. Lawyers acting for the defendants have repeatedly pressed the judicial authorities to investigate these allegations, but they have yet to do so.

Moreover, there is evidence that the use of torture is not confined to state security facilities and that torture is not only used against those accused of being threats to national security.

On 10 July 2012, UAE police arrested three British tourists - Grant Cameron, Karl Williams and Suneet Jeerh – on suspicion of drug offences. The men [told lawyers from Reprieve](#), who visited them in jail in February 2013, that they had been badly beaten and subjected to electric shocks while in custody. Mr Williams told a Reprieve lawyer that police had applied electric shocks to his testicles and that he suffered a broken hand as a result of beatings to which they subjected him. The three men claim that officers put guns to each of their heads and told them they would be shot unless they gave the police the information they required. The men received no legal assistance for six months. Statements in Arabic (a language none of the men can read), which the men claim they signed to prevent further torture, have been accepted by the court as evidence in the case against them. Based on witness testimony and Foreign and Commonwealth Office notes taken on 16 July 2012, a [medical specialist in torture-related injuries](#) concluded that the injuries described in the FCO notes were consistent with the mistreatment described by the three British nationals. On January 24 2013, police charged the men with possession and intent to supply approximately 1kg of synthetic cannabis. On April 3, the UAE authorities claim they responded to a request from the UK government to investigate the torture allegations, but according to Reprieve, who were informed of the substance of the UAE's response by the FCO on April 18, the UAE authorities failed to take any statements from the three alleged victims and failed to conduct either physical or psychological examinations of the men. The trial of the three British nationals is expected to conclude on April 29, the day Sheikh Khalifa arrives in the UK.

On June 12 2012, a Dubai criminal court cleared 13 Dubai police officers of charges of torturing three Pakistani detainees during interrogation in 2010. One of the detainees claimed officers hit him in the groin with a metal bar, then stripped him naked and sprayed his body with WD40, an industrial lubricant harmful to human skin. The court acquitted all the officers on the torture charges.

In addition to concerns over the practice of torture and the denial of the right to a fair trial, the UAE increasingly violates the right to free expression.

In March 2012, UAE authorities closed the local offices of two international organisations: the National Democratic Institute, a body linked to the Democratic Party in the United States, and the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, linked to Germany's Christian Democratic Union. In December 2012, authorities closed down the Abu Dhabi office of the RAND Corporation, a U.S. based research group. All these bodies promote the exchange of ideas and political debate, matters universally

accepted as components of a healthy society and the foundation of democracy. Because the UAE authorities issued no public statements explaining why they ordered these closures, we are unaware of any specific reason for which they were shut down.

The government has also prevented its critics from residing in the UAE. In 2011, a stateless Bidun activist, Yousef al-Mulla, was threatened and fled to an EU country. In July 2012 the authorities deported Bidun Ahmed abd al-Khaleq to Thailand. Abd al-Khaleq was a prominent activist for the rights of the Bidun and a critic of the government. In August 2012, UAE authorities cancelled the residence permits of Matt Duffy, an American journalism professor at Zayed University in Abu Dhabi, who had advocated greater press freedom in the UAE and the region, along with his wife.

The authorities have failed to adequately investigate public death threats, public smear campaigns, and two premeditated assaults against Ahmed Mansoor, another prominent human rights defender.

In November 2012, the UAE also passed a new federal decree on cybercrime that provides a legal basis to prosecute and jail people who use information technology to, among other things, criticise senior officials, argue for political reform, or organise unlicensed demonstrations.

As the cases above all illustrate, there is clear and compelling evidence that the authorities in the UAE are engaged in widespread human rights violations.

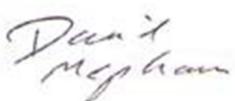
Consistent with commitments your government has made to uphold human rights and basic freedoms internationally, we urge you to use your influence with the UAE government to press for it to bring a prompt end to these abuses and to adhere to basic international human rights standards.

We urge you to follow the guidance that your own government gives to Foreign and Commonwealth Office employees on how they can further the UK's torture prevention agenda overseas, as laid out in the 2011 FCO Strategy for the Prevention of Torture: call publicly on the UAE authorities to allow the UN Committee against Torture to investigate allegations of torture in the country, and recommend that the UAE withdraw its reservation to the Convention that "pain and suffering arising from lawful sanctions" does not fall under the treaty's definition of torture.

We call on you to urge the UAE government to ensure a prompt, transparent and impartial investigation into the allegations of torture and ill-treatment that are reported in the UAE, and ask that you invite independent experts such as the UN Special Rapporteur to conduct a country visit.

Finally, we call on the UK Government to urge the UAE to allow international trial observers to attend the forthcoming sessions of the mass trial of 94 dissidents.

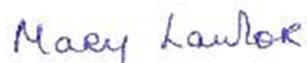
Yours sincerely



David Mepham
UK Director
Human Rights Watch



Allan Hogarth
Head of Policy and Government Affairs
Amnesty International UK



Mary Lawlor
Director
Frontline

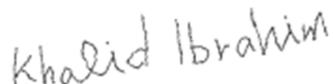


Kate Higham
Investigator
Reprieve

Souhayr Belhassen
President
International Federation for Human Rights Alkarama



Noemie Crottaz
Human Rights Officer



Khalid Ibrahim
Co-Director
Gulf Centre for Human Rights

