

URGENT ACTION

JAILED GOVERNMENT CRITICS ON HUNGER STRIKE

Eighteen government critics, imprisoned after an unfair trial, are on hunger strike in protest at their treatment in a UAE prison. At least three are in critical condition. The men refuse to end their strike until their demands for fair treatment are met.

The men were among 94 defendants, some of whom are connected to the Reform and Social Guidance Association (al-Islah), who faced a grossly unfair trial that began on 4 March 2013. After a closed trial from which independent observers and international media were barred, the Federal Supreme Court convicted 69 of the defendants of charges including association with a group aiming to overthrow the country's political system.

Most of the hunger strikers were arrested between July 2012 and October 2012 and were held for long periods in solitary confinement at undisclosed locations. Many of them reported being tortured or otherwise ill-treated in custody and many of them spent months without legal assistance. Their hunger strike is a protest against alleged ill-treatment by Al-Razeen Prison authorities. They have complained of beatings by prison guards and restrictions placed on family visits. They have also complained of light deprivation and say that prison authorities turn off air conditioning in high temperatures.

Three prisoners who collapsed between 21 August and 28 August were among the first six to go on hunger strike on 31 July. They include prisoners of conscience, **Dr Mohamed al-Mansoori** and **Salem al-Shehhi**; judge, **Mohammed Saeed al-Abdouli**; and **Ali al-Kindi**, **Najeeb Amiri** and **Ahmed Qobaisi**. The other hunger strikers are **Juma al-Felasi**, **Mansoor al-Ahmadi**, **Saif al-Ajlah**, **Abdullah al-Hajiri**, **Fahad al-Hajiri**, **Ali al-Khaja**, **Ahmed al-Zaabi**, **Abdul-Rahman al-Hadidi**, **Hadeef al-Owais**, **Abdussalam Darwish**, **Rashid Sabt**, and **Mahmood al-Hosani**. They are all serving prison sentences ranging from seven to 10 years.

Please write immediately in Arabic, English or your own language:

- Urging the UAE authorities to ensure that all detainees are protected from torture and other ill-treatment, have regular access to their families, are given any necessary medical treatment, and are held in adequate conditions of detention, including ventilation and lighting in line with the Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners;
- Calling on them to investigate allegations of torture immediately and impartially and bring to justice anyone found responsible in accordance with international fair trial standards;
- Calling on the UAE authorities to release immediately and unconditionally anyone held solely for the peaceful exercise of their rights to freedom of expression or association.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 15 OCTOBER 2013 TO:

Vice-President and Prime Minister

Shaikh Mohammad bin Rashid Al-Maktoum

Office of the Prime Minister

POB 2838, Dubai, UAE

Fax: +971 4 3531974

Email via website:

<http://uaepm.ae/English/Pages/ContactUs.aspx>

Salutation: Your Highness

Minister of Interior

Lt-General Sheikh Saif bin Zayed Al-Nahyan

Human Rights Directorate

POB 398

Abu Dhabi, UAE

Fax: +971 4 3981119

Salutation: His Highness

And copies to:

Minister of Justice

Dr Hadeef bin Jua'an Al Dhaheri

Ministry of Justice

Al Khubirah, Sector 93, Street 5

POB 260, Abu Dhabi, UAE

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country.

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**



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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The Reform and Social Guidance Association (al-Islah) is a group that has engaged in peaceful political debate in the UAE since its establishment in 1974. It advocates greater adherence to Islamic precepts and is not known to have used or advocated the use of violence. Its leader, Sultan al-Qasimi, has been held since being arrested in April 2012. In July 2012, Dr Ahmed al-Zaabi, a former judge and member of al-Islah, was sentenced to 12 months in prison and fined by an Abu Dhabi court that convicted him on apparently politically motivated fraud charges. He is believed to have been subjected to torture or other ill-treatment while in detention. On 20 February, an appeal court overturned his prison term, but confirmed the fine.

In July 2012, allegations by the UAE authorities that a "foreign-based" group was threatening state security coincided with the start of a second wave of arrests, which continued until December 2012. None of the families of those arrested were informed of their whereabouts and the prisoners had very limited access to lawyers. Family members of detainees were threatened and, in January 2013, around 10 female relatives of detainees were interrogated, some for up to four hours. They were denied legal representation.

A number of people were arrested and charged for disclosing details of the initial trial sessions on social media websites, including Abdulla al-Hadidi, the son of defendant Abdulrahman al-Hadidi. Abdulla al-Hadidi was arrested on 21 March 2013 and charged, under the new Federal Legal Decree No. 5/2012 on cybercrimes passed in November 2012, with publishing details of the public trial session via social media platform, Twitter. In April, he was sentenced to 10 months in prison and his sentence was upheld by the appeal court in Abu Dhabi on 20 May. Political activist Waleed al-Shehhi was also arrested on 11 May 2013 and charged, under Article 28 of the same decree, with "violating public order" after he expressed concerns about the trial on Twitter. The decree effectively bans all forms of online criticism of the UAE government, as well as prohibiting citizens from passing information to human rights organizations and journalists. After the first few initial trial sessions, family members were barred from attending future sessions.

During the trial defendants told the judge they had been subjected to torture or other ill-treatment, including prolonged detention in solitary confinement, exposure to continuous fluorescent lighting that made it difficult to sleep, inadequate heating and hooding when they were taken from their cells. The authorities have yet to conduct an independent investigation into these allegations and other credible allegations that statements by the defendants used as evidence in their trial were secured by torture. Dr Mohamed al-Mansoori has said that his shoulder was dislocated after prison guards severely beat him.

The UAE acceded to the UN Convention against Torture in July 2012, though it did not recognise the competency of the UN Committee against Torture to investigate individual allegations of torture. The government also made a reservation to the Convention, stating that in its view "pain and suffering arising from lawful sanctions" did not fall under the treaty's definition of torture.

Names: Mohamed al-Mansoori, Salem al-Shehhi, Mohammed Saeed al-Abdouli, Ali al-Kindi, Najeeb Amiri, Ahmed Qobaisi, Juma al-Felasi, Mansoor al-Ahmadi, Saif al-Ajlah, Abdullah al-Hajiri, Fahad al-Hajiri, Ali al-Khaja, Ahmed al-Zaabi, Abdul-Rahman al-Hadidi, Hadeef al-Owais, Abdussalam Darwish, Rashid Sabt, Mahmood al-Hosani.

Gender m/f: m

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