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Middle East/North Africa - United Arab Emirates

Arbitrary imprisonment

Online activist gets three years for criticizing torture of detainees

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The Abu Dhabi federal supreme court has sentenced online human rights activist Osama Al-Najjar to three years in prison and a heavy fine for tweeting about the mistreatment that his father and all the other victims of the "UAE 94" trial received in detention.

Reporters Without Borders condemns this latest case of the Emirati regime's persecution of cyber-dissidents.

According to the information obtained by Reporters Without Borders, the court passed sentence at a 25 November hearing that the defence did not attend. For criticizing prison conditions and mistreatment in detention, **Osama Al-Najjar** was sentenced to not only three years in jail but also a fine of 500,000 dirhams (about 110,000 euros).

He was also convicted of insulting the state via Twitter, inciting hatred and violence, being a member of Al-Islah (a party affiliated to the Muslim Brotherhood), and spreading false information. His laptop, camera and mobile phone were [seized](#) when he was arrested in March and his Twitter account was shut down.

"Najjar spoke out against the torture of detainees and ended up being jailed himself and suffering the same fate," Reporters Without Borders deputy programme director Virginie Dangles said.

"Displaying incredible intolerance, the authorities have opted to silence the messenger instead of questioning their own policies. We urge them to free Najjar immediately and unconditionally, and to overturn his conviction."

Aged 25, Najjar was [arrested](#) at his home on 17 March without any explanation being given, and was [tortured](#) for the first four days after his arrest.

His involvement in online activism was quickly identified. He had expressed support on social networks for the UAE 94 – the 94 Emiratis accused of links with the Muslim Brotherhood, who included his father, Hosseen Al-Najjar – during their trial and had been one of the first to criticize their prison conditions and torture.

There were similar violations of freedom of information in 2013, when other online activists were [convicted](#) for tweeting about the UAE 94 case, in yet further examples of the Emirati judicial system's lack of independence.

Reporters Without Borders calls for an investigation into mistreatment of detainees in the United Arab Emirates under article 12 of the United Nations Convention against Torture, which the UAE has ratified.

The UAE authorities crack down on any suspected or expressed sympathy for the Muslim Brotherhood and censor the Internet heavily.

The UAE is ranked 118th out of 180 countries in the 2014 Reporters Without Borders [press freedom index](#).

