

URGENT ACTION

VERDICT DUE IN TRIAL OF 94 GOVERNMENT CRITICS

Ninety-four critics of the UAE government, including around 60 connected to the Reform and Social Guidance Association (al-Islah), have been on trial since 4 March. Verdicts are due to be handed down on 2 July; each could face up to 15 years in prison.

Lawyers representing the 94, who are all UAE nationals, made their final addresses to the State Security Court on 21 May after a trial in which due process was not followed and from whose hearings independent observers and international media were barred. The lawyers set out the flaws they had identified in the case against their clients and called for their acquittal, arguing, in addition, that their case files had been tampered with and that they had had no access to them for months at a time. On 20 March relatives of the defendants had been informed that they were banned from attending further trial sessions, after details of the trial were disclosed on social media websites.

The 94 defendants are on trial for allegedly violating Article 180 of the Penal Code, which prohibits founding, organizing, or operating a group that aims to overthrow the country's political system. They include at least three prisoners of conscience, human rights lawyers **Dr Mohamed al-Mansoori**, and **Dr Mohamed 'Abdullah al-Roken**; their lawyer **Salem al-Shehhi**; 19-year-old student **Mohammed Salim al-Zumor**; jurist and academic **Dr Hadeef al-Owais**, who had publicly expressed his willingness to defend the detainees; and judge **Mohammed Saeed al-Abdouli**, the former head of an appeal-stage criminal court in Abu Dhabi.

At least 64 of the defendants were held in undisclosed locations for up to a year before the trial, some in solitary confinement for long periods. At least some of them are said to have been tortured or otherwise ill-treated in custody. Many of them spent months without legal assistance and when they did eventually see a lawyer had to do so in the presence of a representative of the State Security Prosecutor.

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

- Urging the authorities to drop any charges that relate solely to the peaceful exercise of the rights to freedom of expression or association and to release immediately and unconditionally all those held on this basis;
- Urging them to ensure that all detainees are protected from torture and other ill-treatment and have access to their families and all necessary medical treatment;
- Calling on them to ensure that independent and impartial investigations are promptly opened into all allegations of torture and other ill-treatment.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 2 JULY 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 2 4414938
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
P.O. Box 260
Abu Dhabi, UAE
Fax: +971 2 6810680

Salutation: Your Excellency

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country.

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date. This is the third update of UA 214/12. Further information:
<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE25/002/2013/en>

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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. Among those detainees that were tortured or otherwise ill-treated, physically or psychologically, during pre-trial detention, were Rashid al-Roken and Abdallah al-Hajeri, respectively the son and son-in-law of Dr Mohamed 'Abdullah al-Roken. After months without legal assistance, some detainees first met a lawyer in November 2012 and others on 20 and 21 February 2013. The meetings took place at the State Security Prosecutor's offices and in the presence of a representative of the Prosecutor, in contravention of UAE law and international fair trial standards. Decisions of the State Security Court, before which they are being tried, cannot be appealed.

Family members of detainees have been 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 have been arrested and charged for disclosing details of the trial on social media websites including Abdulla al-Hadidi, the son of defendant Abdulrahman al-Hadidi, who was arrested on 21 March and charged, under the new Federal Legal Decree No. 5/2012 on cybercrimes passed in November 2012, with publishing, "without probity and in bad faith", details of the public trial session via the 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 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.

Amnesty International has for years expressed concern that trial proceedings in the UAE do not meet international fair trial standards. Last year it campaigned against the imprisonment of five Emirati activists accused of "publicly insulting" top UAE officials. See *Amnesty International: Trial observer finds flagrant flaws in "UAE 5" trial case*, 3 November 2012 (<http://www.amnesty.org/en/news/uae-trial-observer-finds-flagrant-flaws-uae-5-case-2011-11-03>) and an interview with Amnesty International's Secretary General, Salil Shetty, on the case (http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=zju9jBBOAg).

Names: Dr Mohamed al-Mansoori; Dr Mohamed 'Abdullah al-Roken; Salem al-Shehhi; Mohammed Salim al-Zumor; Dr Hadeef al-Owais; Mohammed Saeed al-Abdouli
Gender m/f: m

Further information on UA: 214/12 Index: MDE 25/006/2013 Issue Date: 10 June 2013