



**Middle  
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Committee on  
Academic Freedom

March 29, 2017

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Your Excellencies,

We write to you on behalf of the Committee on Academic Freedom of the Middle East Studies Association of North America (MESA) to express our deep concern about the arrest of Ahmed Mansoor, an international award-winning human rights activist in the United Arab Emirates. Ahmed Mansoor was detained by twelve members of state security at his home in Ajman on March 19, 2017, and taken to an undisclosed location while his computer and cell phones were confiscated without warrant. Mr. Mansoor was the 2015 recipient of the prestigious Martin Ennals Award for Human Rights Defenders; he is one of the few remaining activists in the UAE who has raised publicly the issue of persistent human rights violations in your country. Mr. Mansoor's arrest and disappearance are consistent with an ongoing campaign to silence dissenting voices and suppress all forms of political opposition in the UAE.

MESA was founded in 1966 to support scholarship and teaching on the Middle East and North Africa. The preeminent organization in the field, the Association publishes the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* and has nearly 3000 members worldwide. MESA is committed to ensuring academic freedom and freedom of expression, both within the region and in connection with the study of the region in North America and elsewhere.

Ahmed Mansoor has long spoken in favor of human rights and freedom of speech in the UAE. He founded the [www.uaehewar.net](http://www.uaehewar.net) website in August 2009 as a platform for the discussion of politics, development, and society in the Emirates. Mr. Mansoor also was one of the 133 signatories of a petition for moderate political reforms that

was presented to H.E. President Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan in March 2011. Mr. Mansoor subsequently was targeted in an online smear campaign on social media and was one of the “UAE 5” arrested in April 2011 on charges of “perpetrating acts that pose a threat to state security, undermining the public order, opposing the government system, and insulting the President.” In November 2011, the “UAE 5” were convicted of insulting the rulers of the UAE following a trial criticized by international human rights organizations. Although Mr. Mansoor and the other members of the “UAE 5” were pardoned by President Sheikh Khalifa the day after their conviction, their convictions remained on file and meant they could not secure the Certificate of Good Conduct needed to work in the UAE or travel internationally. Mr. Mansoor lost his job as an engineer in a telecommunications firm and was unable to travel to Geneva in 2015 to accept in person the Martin Ennals Award for Human Rights Defenders.

The Emirati news agency WAM on March 21, 2017 quoted the Public Prosecutor as stating that Mr. Mansoor is accused of using social media “to publish false information and rumors” in posts that “harm national unity and social harmony and damage the country’s reputation.” We are concerned that the nature of these charges and Mr. Mansoor’s detention at an undisclosed location place him at risk of ill-treatment at the hands of the security services. We note that the UAE amended its 2006 Cyber Crimes Law in 2012 and that the new decree (Federal Legal Decree No. 5 for 2012) issued by President Sheikh Khalifa included a sweeping declaration stipulating “penalties of imprisonment” for any act intended to “damage the reputation or the stature of the state or any of its institutions, its President, the Vice President, any of the Rulers of the emirates, their Crown Princes, the Deputy Rulers, the national flag, the national anthem, the emblem of the state or any of its symbols.”

There are numerous examples of individuals arbitrarily being detained and imprisoned for speech-related offences in the UAE since 2015. Most pertinent to the case of Mr. Mansoor is that of Professor Nasser bin Ghaith who, a member of the “UAE 5” like Mr. Mansoor, was detained, convicted, and pardoned in 2011 and about whom we have written to you on multiple occasions (see our letters dated January 31, 2017, August 22, 2016, August 21, 2015, and June 8, 2011). Professor bin Ghaith was re-arrested by State Security in Abu Dhabi on August 18, 2015, and charged with various breaches of the UAE penal code, including violations of the 2012 Cyber Crimes Law and the 2014 Terrorism Law. Similar to the account provided by Mr. Mansoor’s family of his arrest on March 19, 2017, Professor bin Ghaith’s home was thoroughly searched by police prior to his detention and items were taken away for investigation. Professor bin Ghaith’s trial has been postponed repeatedly, his health is failing amid reports he has been denied access to medication, and he has been subjected to character assassination in an op-ed published in *The National* in February 2017 that portrayed him as “part of an alliance of militant extremists who seek the overthrow of legitimate governments.”

Ahmed Mansoor has been held incommunicado since his detention. Others in his position have been held without access to legal representation or any public disclosure of their whereabouts for months before they have been brought to trial. Under international law, a state violates the prohibition against enforced



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disappearance when it takes a person into custody and then either denies it is detaining the person, or fails to disclose the person's whereabouts. "Disappeared" people are also at high risk of torture, and many prisoners have made allegations about the lack of due process and their mistreatment while in secret custody pending trial. An October 2013 investigation by *Reprive* into reports of torture at Dubai Central Jail suggested that more than 75 percent of prisoners had been physically abused at some point after their arrest while 96 percent had been subjected to questioning without ever having seen a lawyer and 95 percent were interviewed by prosecutors without a lawyer present.

We urge the UAE authorities to respect internationally recognized standards of free speech and due process, and to release Mr. Mansour and other prisoners of conscience whose only "crime" has been to express their opinions in a non-violent manner. Such actions on the part of the state violate the commitment to opening minds and fostering intellectual creativity that the UAE professes in its global branding efforts and its partnerships with leading international universities. We look forward to your timely response to this urgent matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "B. Baron" followed by a horizontal flourish.

Beth Baron  
MESA President  
Professor, City University of New York

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Amy W. Newhall" in a cursive style.

Amy W. Newhall  
MESA Executive Director  
Associate Professor, University of Arizona

cc:

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