



**Middle  
East  
Studies  
Association**  
of North America, Inc.

3542 N Geronimo Ave  
Tucson AZ 85705 USA

tel 520-333-2577  
fax 520-207-3166  
caf@mesana.org  
www.mesana.org



Committee on  
Academic Freedom

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HH Sheikh Mohammad Bin Rashid Al Maktoum  
Prime Minister's Office  
PO Box: 212000  
Dubai, United Arab Emirates  
Fax: +971 4 330 404  
[info@primeminister.ae](mailto:info@primeminister.ae)

HE Sheikh Saif bin Zayed Al Nahyan  
Minister of Interior  
Zayed Sport City, Arab Gulf Street, Near to Shaikh Zayed Mosque  
PO Box: 398, Abu Dhabi  
United Arab Emirates  
Fax: +971 2 402 2762 / +971 2 441 5780  
[moi@moi.gov.ae](mailto:moi@moi.gov.ae)

HE Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan  
Minister of Foreign Affairs  
Al Bateen, King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz Al Saud Street  
Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates  
Fax +971 02 444 7766  
[info@mofa.gov.ae](mailto:info@mofa.gov.ae)

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 profound dismay that the internationally-recognized human rights activist Ahmed Mansoor remains in secret detention seemingly without regard for any form of due process or the rule of law one year after his arrest on 19 March 2017. We previously wrote to you about Mr. Mansoor's arrest on 29 March 2017. The 2015 recipient of the prestigious Martin Ennals Award for Human Rights Defenders and a member of the advisory boards of Human Rights Watch and the Gulf Center for Human Rights, Ahmed Mansoor was one of the few remaining activists in the United Arab Emirates who raised in public the escalating crackdown on human rights and freedom of speech in your country.

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 2500 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 was detained by twelve members of state security more than one year ago and taken to an undisclosed location while his computer and cell phones were confiscated without warrant. Mr. Mansoor was permitted two family visits, on 3 April and 17 September 2017, but continues to be held in secret detention and it remains unclear what charges he faces or whether legal proceedings are underway in his case. On 27 February 2018, the Martin Ennals Award for Human Rights Defenders issued a joint

statement with Front Line Defenders and other human rights organizations that called on UAE authorities to release Mr. Mansoor and, pending his release, disclose his whereabouts, and ensure access to legal representation and protection from torture and mistreatment.

Your Excellencies, we believe that Mr. Mansoor's disappearance is consistent with a systematic attempt to suppress all forms of political opposition and silence dissenting voices in the UAE. 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."

Moreover, we note also that in August 2014 President Sheikh Khalifa issued Terrorism Law No.7 of 2014, which *Human Rights Watch* claims "opens the way to terrorism prosecutions of those who express peaceful opposition to the government, whether verbally or in writing." Article 1 of the new Terrorism Law defined a "terrorist outcome" as "antagonizing the state" without requiring an intent to cause death or serious injury. Article 14 set the death penalty or life imprisonment for anyone who acts with intent to "undermine the stability, safety, unity, sovereignty, or security of the State" or to "undermine national unity or social peace" –exceptionally broad definitions of "terrorism." Article 15 stipulates a sentence of between three and fifteen years for anyone who "publicly declares his animosity or lack of allegiance to the State or the regime."

It is noticeable how similar the provisions of the 2014 Terrorism Law are to the 2012 Cyber Crimes Decree. This means that the same offenses that would have been tried under the 2012 legislation may now be tried as terrorism offenses with the greater range and severity of penalties available. Mr. Mansoor was one of the "UAE5" 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.

In addition to Mr. Mansoor's current incarceration, which the Emirati news agency WAM has attributed to his use of social media "to publish false information and rumors" in posts that "harm national unity and social harmony and damage the country's reputation," there are many other examples of individuals arbitrarily being detained and imprisoned for speech-related offences in the UAE since 2012. In 2013 a mass trial of people (the "UAE94") including judges, lawyers, academics, student leaders, and human rights activists, resulted in the conviction of 69 on charges that included "association with a group that aimed to overthrow the country's political system." Among the convicted was

Mohammed al-Roken, a lawyer who had been banned from writing a regular newspaper column in 2000 and removed from his university position two years later.

We have written to you on multiple occasions (most recently on 5 April 2017, 22 August 2016, and 21 August 2015) about the case of Nasser bin Ghaith, an economics professor who, like Mr. Mansoor, was a member of the "UAE5" detained, convicted, and pardoned in 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. Like Mr. Mansoor, Professor bin Ghaith was held incommunicado while awaiting trial, which was postponed repeatedly amid reports that he had been mistreated and was in failing health due to being denied access to medication. On 29 March 2017 – nine days after Mr. Mansoor was arrested – the Federal Appeals Court in Abu Dhabi sentenced Professor bin Ghaith to ten years' imprisonment over public statements and tweets critical of Egypt and of UAE government policy.

We urge the UAE authorities to immediately disclose the whereabouts of Mr. Mansoor and accord him the due process he has been denied for so long. Moreover, we call on Emirati officials to respect internationally recognized standards of free speech and end the persecution of Mr. Mansoor and others whose only "crime" has been to express their opinions in a non-violent manner. The UAE has invested heavily in global branding with leading international universities, but such systematic harassment on the part of the state is an egregious violation of the commitment to opening minds and fostering creativity inherent in such partnerships.

We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Judith E. Tucker  
MESA President  
Professor, Georgetown University



Amy W. Newhall  
MESA Executive Director

cc:

HE Yousef Al Otaiba, Ambassador of the United Arab Emirates to the United States  
Fax: 1 202 243 2432, [info@uaeembassy-usa.org](mailto:info@uaeembassy-usa.org)