



ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCES IN THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

The UAE authorities regularly disappear activists, human rights defenders and government critics. When people are forcibly disappeared, they are taken directly off the street or from their homes by state officials with no explanation as to why they are being detained or where they are being taken, and they are unable to notify their families or a lawyer. Enforced disappearances are in violation of international law.

- People who are forcibly disappeared are kept in a secret location for an unspecified amount of time. As they have no contact with their families or the outside world, their whereabouts remain unknown and they are unlikely to receive any support.

In December 2015, Jordanian journalist Tayseer al-Najjar was arrested by UAE authorities without charge, and taken to an unknown location where he was denied access to a lawyer, or contact with his family. He was held for over a year in this state, before eventually being charged with committing cybercrimes in reference to a series of Facebook posts in which he criticised the UAE's foreign policy and Israel's war on Gaza. In March 2017, he was sentenced to 3 years in prison.

- Victims of enforced disappearances are often tortured or otherwise ill-treated and endure ongoing physical and psychological abuse.

In August 2015, academic and economist Dr. Nasser bin Ghaith was arrested without charge and forcibly disappeared after political tweetings. He was tortured while being detained for 9 months. His complaints were rejected in court and never investigated.

- UAE government authorities try to conceal the fate of the disappeared person and do not acknowledge the deprivation of their liberty.
- Enforced disappearances not only affect the victims but also their families, as they are left without any information on their missing family member. This leads to a huge sense of insecurity and constant worrying about their health, and questions as to when or if they will ever return. Searching for the missing person can put the relatives into great danger, even being subjected to disappearance themselves.



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After posting comments on Twitter on the unlawful imprisonment of their brother Dr. Issa al-Suweidi, his three sisters Asma, Mariam, and Al Yazzyah al-Suweidi were forcibly disappeared in February 2015. They were secretly detained for three months before being released.

- Enforced disappearances spread insecurity and fear within the society.
- In the UAE, forced disappearances are regularly used by the Emirati authorities to suppress political opposition and silence dissenting voices. Human rights defenders in particular are often targeted.

In March 2017, the prominent human rights activist Ahmed Mansoor was disappeared to an unknown location by authorities. Since his detention, he has had no contact with his family, and been denied access to a lawyer. Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have since launched campaigns demanding his immediate and unconditional release.

- In 2010, the UN treaty on the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance came into force. The convention aims at preventing enforced disappearances worldwide. So far the UAE has declined to ratify this treaty.
- The UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances (WGEID) regularly meets with government authorities, NGOs, legal representatives and relatives of disappeared persons in order to investigate cases and report on them. The WGEID has requested a visit to the UAE but has so far not received the obligatory invitation from the Emirati authorities.