

FACT SHEET

DR. MOHAMMED AL-ROKEN

In recent years, the Emirati authorities have cracked down heavily on freedom of speech and expression in the country - so much so that the UAE now has one of the highest rates of political prisoners per capita anywhere in the world. Expressing opinions – particularly when this involves political dissent – too often leads to arrests and disappearances. Dr. Mohammed al-Roken is one of these victims.

Dr Mohammed al-Roken is a leading human rights lawyer and academic. He has dedicated much of his career to providing legal assistance to victims of human rights violations in the United Arab Emirates. Willing to protect the rights of others at the risk of his own freedom, he often took on cases that were deemed “dangerous” to defend.

Arrest and sentence

- On the 17 July 2012, Dr. Mohammed al-Roken was arrested and put into secret detention, hours after State Security had arrested both his son and son-in-law.
- Almost a year later, on July 2, 2013, Dr Mohammed al-Roken was unfairly tried along with 93 other defendants, in case commonly referred to as the “UAE 94” trials. He, and 64 other social and political activists, were charged with “plotting against the government” after signing a petition calling for democratic reforms in the UAE - al-Roken received a 10-year sentence.



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Violations of due process

- Prior to being sentenced, al-Roken was held in solitary confinement in an unknown location.
- He was denied access to a lawyer during this period.
- Many of the “UAE 94” were forced to sign confessions under torture.

Mistreatment in detention

- Dr Mohammed Al-Roken is being held in the notoriously repressive Al-Razeen prison, located in the desert, approximately 120km from Abu Dhabi.
- Al-Razeen prison routinely fails to meet the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners. The severity of the prison conditions and treatment of inmates has led the facility to be compared to the likes of Guantanamo Bay.
- In November 2015, Amnesty International reported that Mohammed al-Roken had been subjected to ‘music torture’ after security forces blasted propaganda music in his cell at excruciating volumes, continuously for hours on end – causing him to pass out due to high blood pressure.

International response

Dr. Mohammed Al-Roken’s imprisonment has led to significant condemnation from the international community. In December 2014, over 100,000 people pressed for his release as a part of Amnesty International’s Write for Rights campaign.

Amnesty International released a statement criticizing the proceedings and verdicts, stating that “not only do the defendants appear to have been targeted simply because of their views, but they have been convicted on bogus charges and denied the basic right to a fair trial”.

In 2017, al-Roken won a prestigious human rights prize, the Ludovic Trarieux Award, for ‘dedicating two decades to defending fundamental freedoms.’

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