



# HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS IN THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

Basic human rights are routinely abused by the authorities in the United Arab Emirates. Human rights defenders and activists are constantly targeted for any form of dissent or criticism and meted out harsh punishments. The following are all violations under international human rights law.

## . Denial of freedom of expression

Freedom of expression is a basic human right violated by the government. In the UAE, the press is censored and civil society organisations and citizens are subject to intense monitoring and surveillance. Any criticism of the government, its allies, or its ruling family can lead to imprisonment. In 2016 alone, 300 people were arrested for publishing comments on social media that were critical of the government or its ruling family.

**Ahmed Mansoor**, Emirati activist, is the winner of the 2015 Martin Ennals Award for Human Rights Defenders. Citizens Lab revealed that his computer and phone were hacked by the UAE authorities with spyware “to monitor his online activities”. He was arrested in March 2017 for promoting human rights on Facebook and Twitter.

## . Arbitrary detention and enforced disappearances

Arbitrary detention typically takes the form of an arrest without a warrant nor an explanation. Enforced disappearance consists of being held in a secret location without access to legal representation nor family visits. This exposes the subject to a heightened risk of torture and other ill-treatment because it provides the authorities with the power to behave with impunity.

**Asma, Mariam, and Al Yazzyah al-Suweidi** were forcibly disappeared in 2015 for having posted comments criticizing the UAE authorities regarding the arbitrary imprisonment of their brother. The 3 were held incommunicado and tortured in pre-trial detention for 3 months before being released without charge.

## . Torture and other ill-treatment

Torture is often used by Emirati prison officials to force false confessions. Victims are not only physically assaulted but also psychologically humiliated, and denied access to medical care. Although international law requires authorities to investigate all allegations of torture and declares that any abuses should be appropriately compensated, the UAE repeatedly refuses to follow this procedure.



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Mosaab Ahmed Abd el Aziz, son of a former adviser to the deposed Egyptian president Mohamed Morsi, was tortured by Emirati authorities to confess to membership of the Muslim Brotherhood which is classified as a terrorist organisation in the UAE. He reported being denied legal support and being subject to “brutal physical and psychological torture.”

## . Unfair trials

Unfair trials include the denial of any legal assistance or refusal to investigate allegations made by the defendant regarding torture. In the UAE, trials are often closed to international media or independent observers. Furthermore, being controlled by the government, the judiciary lacks independence and therefore cannot guarantee the defendant an objective trial.

In 2011, a group of activists petitioned for democratic reforms in the UAE. In what is known as the **UAE 94 case**, 69 of the 94 signatories were convicted in a mass trial, which the International Commission of Jurists declared as “manifestly unfair”. The rights of the defendants were severely violated as family members, international observers and media were denied access to the trial. The prosecution also failed to deliver credible evidence of any criminal offence committed by the group, making the trial highly unfair.

## . Citizenship revocation

Citizenship revocation, travel bans, and deportations are employed as tools to crack down on activists and their family members. Revoking someone’s citizenship affects their ability to travel, to hold a job, open a bank account, drive, and even go to school. By making people stateless in their own country, the practice contravenes the UN Declaration of Human Rights by denying the ‘Right to Nationality’.

**Mohammed Abdulrazzaq Al-Siddiq** had his citizenship revoked as part of his punishment for being convicted in the famous mass trial of Emirati political dissidents known as the “UAE 94”. His children Asma, 29, Doa’a, 25, and Omar, 23 have also seen their citizenship revoked, without explanation nor an official, written decree.

## . Denial of freedom of association and assembly

Civil and political liberties are denied in the UAE as citizens have no rights to elect any representatives in the government. All political parties are banned and expressing a political opinion can lead to imprisonment.

Both the **Teachers Union** and **Jurists Union** were banned in 2012 and replaced with government bodies. By banning trade unions, the UAE government violates workers’ rights of association and assembly.