

The International Campaign for Freedom in the United Arab Emirates

QUARTERLY BRIEFING

JANUARY - MARCH 2019

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The last quarter has seen no improvements in terms of the human rights situation in the United Arab Emirates.

Despite growing international pressure, the Emirati authorities are refusing to grant medical release to a terminally-ill female prisoner of conscience who has just months left to live. The UAE also continue to arbitrarily hold political prisoners beyond their release dates, with two years now having passed since the expiration of Osama al-Najjar's sentence.

The last three months have additionally seen a quick succession of cases whereby British nationals have been arrested on spurious grounds in the UAE.

Persistent human rights violations led a string of high-profile attendees to pull out of the Emirates Literature Festival in March; most notably, the former president of Ireland, Mary Robinson, who cancelled her appearance in January over the continued detention of UAE rights activist, Ahmed Mansoor.



ICF UAE



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INTERNATIONAL PRESSURE GROWS ON UAE TO RELEASE CANCER-STRICKEN DETAINEE



Pressure is growing on the UAE authorities to release a terminally-ill female prisoner of conscience amid widespread reports of her mistreatment and abuse in UAE's Tawan prison hospital.

With just months left to live, Alia Abdel Nour is reportedly shackled to a hospital bed in a windowless room without ventilation, denied access to adequate medical care and is being refused regular contact with her family.

In recent months, Human Rights Watch, MEPs and UN rights experts have urged the UAE authorities to grant the detainee early release on medical grounds, something which they have so far refused, despite it being permitted under Emirati law.

In an open letter sent in March to Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed, a coalition of ten members of the European Parliament said:

“In the spirit of the UAE’s 2019 Year of

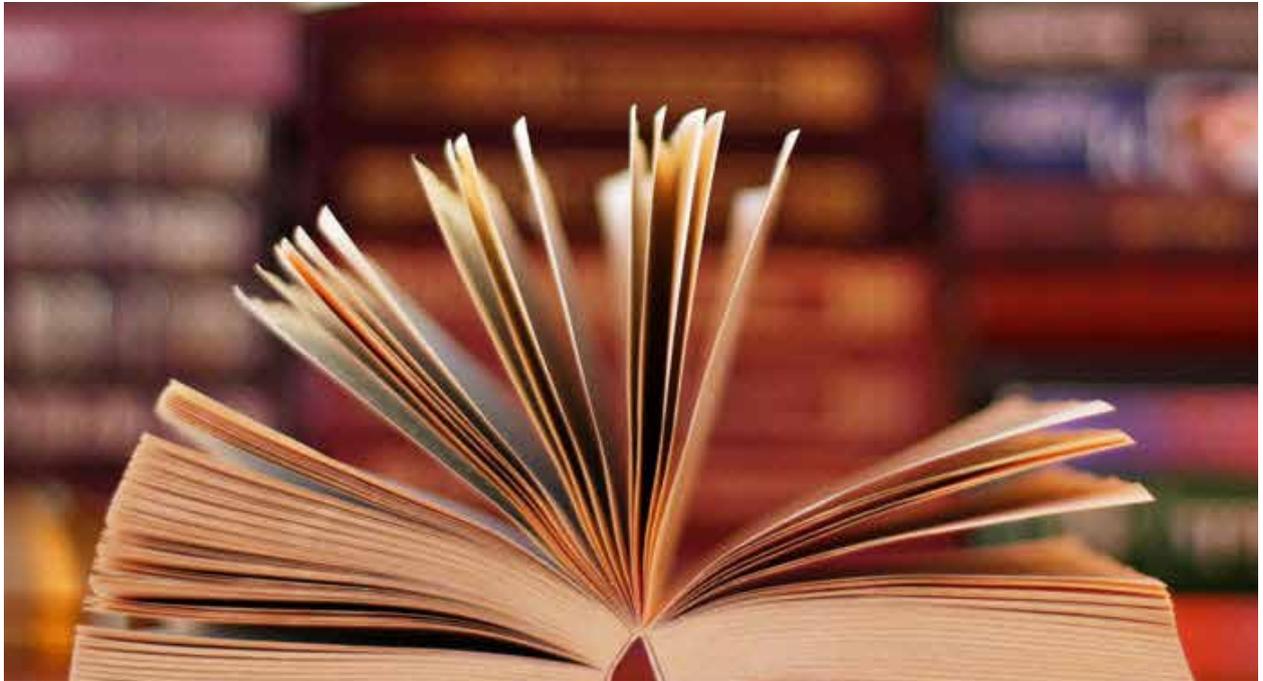
Tolerance, we call on you to use the authority of your office, as the Crown Prince of the United Arab Emirates, to secure the release of Alia Abdel Nour, and pending her release, to unshackle her and allow family members unimpeded access to her.”

Alia was arrested in 2015, and held without charge for 15 months, four of which in an unknown location. In a trial Human Rights Watch have described as “marred by due process violations”, she was later sentenced to 10 years in prison on charges of ‘financing terrorism’.

Despite being diagnosed with breast cancer a month into her arrest, Alia was repeatedly denied access to adequate medical care and only transferred to a hospital over a year after the diagnosis, according to family members.

The Emirati authorities are yet to make a public statement on her case.

EMIRATES FESTIVAL OF LITERATURE MARRIED BY BOYCOTTS AND PROTESTS



This year's Dubai Literature Festival was met with high-profile boycotts after a string of widely reported instances of human rights abuses in the UAE.

Several attendees, including historian Anthony Beevor and BBC Journalist Frank Gardner, pulled out of the event late last year in response to the UAE's arrest of British PhD student Matthew Hedges on dubious espionage charges.

In January, they were joined by the former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mary Robinson, who cancelled her scheduled appearance in response to an open letter in the Guardian that called for the release of Ahmed Mansoor, a prominent Emirati rights activist who is currently serving a 10-year jail sentence for Twitter comments critical of the regime.

The annually-run festival, which touts itself as "the Arab world's largest

celebration of the written and spoken word," has long been criticised by rights groups, who view it as a PR-tool used by the regime to whitewash human rights abuses in the country.



TWO YEARS AFTER COMPLETING HIS SENTENCE, OSAMA AL-NAJJAR REMAINS DETAINED



Two years have now passed since the expiration of Osama al-Najjar's sentence. Yet the Emirati prisoner of conscience remains detained in UAE's al-Razeen prison, with little hope of release.

On March 17, 2017, al-Najjar was due to be freed after serving a three-year sentence for tweeting about human rights abuses, but instead was transferred to a so-called counselling centre within the al-Razeen prison facility after the court deemed him a 'threat' to national security.

As there is no trial proceeding this form of detention, those transferred to such facilities can be held indefinitely with the government - rather than the judiciary - handing down punishment.

In recent years, a number of prisoners of conscience in the UAE have been transferred to counselling centres at the

end of their sentence including: Ahmed Mohammed Al-Mulla, Badr Al-Bahri and Abdullah Al-Helou.

The UAE authorities claim the purpose of such centres is to guide and reform those convicted of terrorist offences. However, the above cases, where none were convicted of terrorism, suggests counselling centres are being used instead to silence political dissidents.

Both Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch are campaigning for Osama al-Najjar's immediate and unconditional release.

THE UAE CONTINUES TO DETAIN BRITISH NATIONALS



The recent months have seen a quick succession of cases whereby British nationals have been arrested on spurious grounds in the UAE.

In January, a British football fan was arrested allegedly for wearing a Qatar national team shirt to an Asian Cup match.

Ali Issa Ahmad, 26, has since been released from custody and able to return home.

In a subsequent interview with the Guardian, Ahmad said that he had been tortured in detention; he had reportedly been stabbed and deprived of sleep, food and water for several days.

According to the Guardian, Ahmad had a series of knife wounds to his arm, a stab wound to his side and further injuries to his chest. He appeared dazed, exhausted and in a state of shock.

Commenting on Ahmad's statement, the UAE Embassy in London rejected that he had been detained for wearing a

Qatar football shirt, claiming that "his injuries were inconsistent with his account of the event and appeared to be self-inflicted".

Another British citizen, Andrew Neal, has been arrested in the UAE on dubious drug-related allegations.

According to Detained in Dubai, the former soldier has been forced to sign a false confessions in Arabic, a language he does not understand.

In an audio recording from prison obtained by Sky News, Andrew Neal appealed to the British Government to negotiate his safe return home.

Neal remains detained in the UAE without charge.



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