

The International Campaign for Freedom in the United Arab Emirates

QUARTERLY BRIEFING

JULY - SEPTEMBER 2018

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The past few months in the United Arab Emirates have seen a deterioration in terms of the human rights situation. In May, Abu Dhabi's Supreme Court sentenced the award-winning Emirati rights activist Ahmed Mansoor to 10 years in jail for his social media activity. In addition, the whereabouts and well-being of Princess Sheikha Latifa al-Maktoum – the daughter of the ruler of Dubai – remains unknown, six months after she was abducted by UAE and Indian forces while trying to escape the country to seek asylum in the US. Meanwhile the United Nations have accused the Emirati regime of committing systematic rights violations and possible war crimes in Yemen.



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10 YEARS FOR A TWEET: UAE SENTENCE PROMINENT EMIRATI RIGHTS ACTIVIST AHMED MANSOOR



On the 30th of May, Abu Dhabi's Supreme Court sentenced the award-winning Emirati human rights defender Ahmed Mansoor to 10 years in jail for "defaming the UAE through social media channels."

On top of this hefty sentence, the court issued the maximum fine of \$270,000 and ordered him to be placed on close surveillance for a further three years after his release.

According to local news outlets, Mansoor was accused of using social media to "spread rumours and lies about the UAE" by "publishing false information that damages the country's reputation."

The prominent rights activist was arrested in March of last year after falling foul of the UAE's cybercrime laws. He went on to be held for over a year without charge in an unverified location without access to a lawyer and was only permitted two short, supervised family visits.

His current detention location remains unknown, which places him at grave risk of torture and other forms of ill-treatment.

In the weeks leading up to his arrest he had been using social media to call for the release of Emirati prisoner of conscience Osama al-Najjar, who remains in prison despite completing his sentence in March 2017. Al-Najjar himself was convicted in line with the cybercrime law after tweets to the UAE Minister of Interior expressing concern that his father had been tortured in prison.

Ahmed Mansoor is one of the world's most prominent human rights defenders. Over the years he has worked extensively with international organisations to advocate for basic civil and political rights in the United Arab Emirates and has a seat on the advisory committee at Human Rights Watch. In 2015, he won the prestigious Martin Ennals Award for Human Rights Defenders.

His case has sparked international condemnation, notably from several United Nations human rights bodies, the EU Parliament's subcommittee on Human Rights, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch.

UN REPORT ACCUSES UAE OF WAR CRIMES AND HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES IN YEMEN



In a damning report released last month, UN experts found that Saudi-led coalition forces in Yemen had killed thousands of civilians in indiscriminate airstrikes, raped and tortured prisoners in secret jails and - through the imposition of a naval and air blockade - brought the most impoverished nation in the Arab world to the brink of famine.

While the 41-page report, which charts the period of the conflict from September 2014 to June 2018, charges all actors, including the Houthi Rebels, of flouting international law and committing potential war crimes, investigators said Emirati and Saudi airstrikes were responsible for most civilian fatalities - citing indiscriminate coalition attacks on residential areas, marketplaces, weddings, funerals, medical facilities and jails.

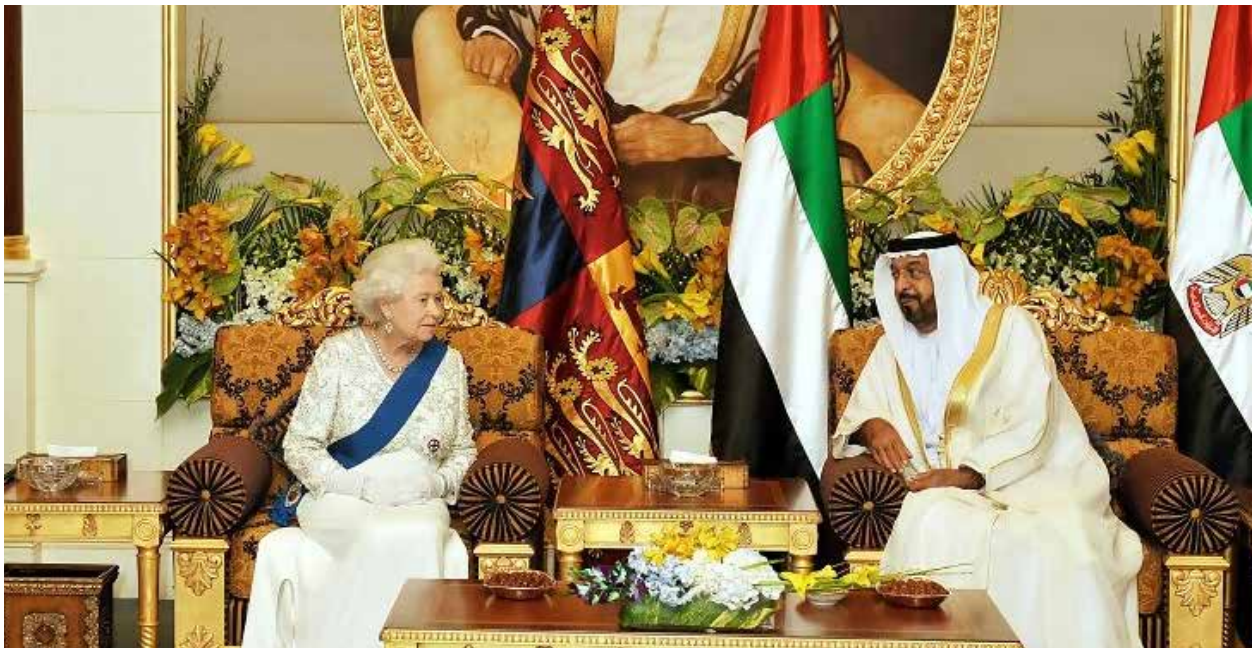
According to official figures, the conflict has so far claimed the lives of at least 6,475 civilians, but investigators suggested that the real figure is likely to be significantly

higher.

In addition, UN experts said that the Saudi-led coalition's military blockade of the country, which has been imposed to varying degrees since the onset of the conflict in 2015, has created one of the world's largest humanitarian crises. Since November 2017, Saudi and UAE forces have imposed a total naval and air blockade on all borders of Yemen preventing all humanitarian aid and commercial trade, including food and fuel, into the country. As of April 2018, 17.8m Yemenis were food insecure and 8.4m were on the brink of famine. Moreover, a lack of clean water, medical supplies and the absence of a functioning healthcare system have led to an outbreak of cholera in the region's poorest nation.

Investigators also cited widespread practices of arbitrary detention and torture in Emirati-controlled prisons across the country. On a visit to two UAE-administered facilities in the south of Yemen, UN experts found that Emirati personnel had subjected detainees to torture and sexual abuse, including the rape of adult male detainees. On closer inspection, investigators also found that many prison inmates had been disappeared, held without charge, not given the right to a fair trial, denied access to a lawyer and had been detained incommunicado for prolonged or indefinite periods of time.

UAE - UK LOBBYING: SUBVERTING DEMOCRACY AND STIFLING POLITICAL DEBATE



The UK-based investigative agency, Spinwatch, has released a report revealing a comprehensive lobbying campaign by the UAE in Britain.

The 52-page report illustrated how, between 2011 and 2013, the UAE conducted a far-reaching lobbying campaign targeting journalists, policymakers, academics, businessmen, civil servants and MPs through the UAE's Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, Anwar Gargash, and the lobbying firm Quiller Consultants.

According to Spinwatch the Emirati lobbying efforts were enforced by threats to prevent important defence and oil related contracts.

The report draws on a number of leaked emails between lobbyists and some of Britain's top diplomats, describing the "aggressive nature of the UAE lobby and how it operated in the UK and US in an effort to bend those countries' home and foreign policy to promote its interests and further its agenda".

The report includes emails from an Emirati lobbying group to influence the BBC's coverage of the Arab spring and goes on to provide damning evidence of the ways in which the UAE has penetrated democracy and stifled debate within UK political and social life, concluding:

"Promising billions in return for influence in the US, infiltrating the British media to smear rivals, threatening to interfere in British parliamentary select committee reports, buying politicians' loyalty with lavish trips, donating to think-tanks and trying to influence them and protesting against press freedom - something that the UAE does not itself recognise - some would see as a step too far."

CAPTIVE DUBAI PRINCESS: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL CALLS FOR THE RELEASE OF SHEIKHA LATIFA



On the sixth-month anniversary of her disappearance, Amnesty International have called on the Emirati authorities to release Sheikha Latifa al-Maktoum.

Princess Latifa - who is the daughter of Mohammed Bin Rashid Al-Maktoum, the ruler of Dubai - has been held incommunicado since her abduction earlier this year by Indian and Emirati special forces during an attempt to flee the country to seek asylum in the US.

The rights group released a statement urging the Emirati and Indian authorities “to investigate and hold to account all officials implicated in unlawful acts in the course of its raid on the Nostromo, including arbitrary detention and physical abuse which may rise to the level of torture.”

In March 2018, Sheikha Latifa, 32, attempted to escape the UAE after revealing the torture and abuse she had suffered at the hands of her father and ruler of Dubai, Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al-Maktoum. Aided by five non-Emiratis on board the US-flagged ship, the Nostramo, Latifa planned to set sail to Goa, then travel to Mumbai to catch a flight to the US, where she intended to claim political asylum.

This was thwarted after Indian and Emirati special forces raided the yacht in the middle of the night 50km off the coast of Goa in international waters. Latifa and the crew on board, which included a US and Finnish citizen, were detained by Emirati forces who forcefully took them back to the UAE. Although the crew were released and deported from the Emirates two weeks later, Latifa has remained held inside the country - allegedly against her will.

Latifa’s plight came to light after her legal team, Detained in Dubai, released a 40-minute video in which the princess provides details of the torture and abuse she faced growing up at the hands of her father, Bin Rashid Al-Maktoum. Latifa ordered the vlog to be made public if her escape attempt failed.

Since her capture the Dubai princess’s whereabouts and perhaps more pertinently her well-being remains unknown.

The UAE government have come under increased pressure to reveal Latifa’s location. The story of her escape attempt, her capture and subsequent disappearance has caused a media storm and drawn condemnation from rights organisations.

Suggesting that Latifa’s case should be investigated as an enforced disappearance, Amnesty urged the UAE to grant the captive princess “full and unrestricted freedom of movement and communication with the outside world.”

Adding: “If she is only held for having tried to flee the country or for any other reason incompatible with human rights standards, she should be immediately and unconditionally released and her right to freedom of movement, including travel abroad, should be respected.”



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