



# MISTREATMENT OF PRISONERS IN THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

Although the Emirati government claims to have updated prison and detention conditions, mistreatment of inmates in the UAE still violates international norms of human rights.

## 1. Arbitrary arrest

Prisoners are often arbitrarily arrested and imprisoned after unfair trials where the process is neither certain nor fair. This is against the UN Universal Declaration on Human Rights.

- Activists can be forcibly disappeared and detained in secret locations for speaking out against the authorities. They may be unsure of the exact nature of the charges and be denied access to a lawyer and family visits.
- Conditions in UAE prisons and detention centers are poor with severe overcrowding meaning bed space is often shared and some prisoners are forced to sleep on the floor.
- While records are rarely made public, figures from the International Centre for Prison Studies stated that UAE's prison occupancy rate was 158% in 2006.
- The UAE also has the highest rate of foreign national prisoners at 92% of the prison population, they too are also subjected to mistreatment.

## 2. Use of torture

Prisoners of conscience are particularly vulnerable to torture and harassment. There has been an increased crackdown on dissenting voices since 2011, followed by the 2012 restrictive cybercrime law which has enabled authorities to target those who criticise the government online.

- Reprieve 2013 report on Dubai Central Jail contains statistical evidence of systematic torture in the UAE. Of the 124 prisoners interviewed, 75% had been mistreated, 96% were questioned without a lawyer, and 85% were forced to sign documents in a language they could not understand.
- Both physical assaults and psychological abuse are used in UAE jails to force confessions.
- Methods of torture include severe beatings, solitary confinement, sleep deprivation, sexual harassment, procurement of expired food to poison detainees and humiliating inspections.

Prisoner of conscience and lawyer Dr Mohammed Al Roken had a panic attack after being subjected to loudspeakers suddenly at night, which made him faint. He was found suffering from high blood pressure and inflammation in the ear as a result of the amplifiers. However, in the morning, loudspeakers were used again.



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## 3. Medical mistreatment

The UAE federal law guarantees that every prison administration should provide as a minimum: medical examinations inside and outside the prison, treatment in case of emergency, places with appropriate equipment and adequate supply of medication. In reality:

- Prisoners who have been subjected to torture are often unable to access adequate medical care.
- Four foreign nationals detained since August 2014 without charge were subjected to beatings and electric shocks, according to UN sources.
- The UN Special Rapporteur on the right to health also noted that the detainees suffered from serious health conditions, including permanent loss of sight and hearing and risk of paralysis but were unable to access the medical care they needed.

Dr. bin Ghait was denied his high blood pressure medication for several weeks in prison, under false excuses. This placed him at further risk of heart conditions. He suffered from serious medical complications which were not taken into account by any doctor in the prison.

## 4. Lack of access to legal representation and family visits

Article 23 of the UAE federal law No. 43 of 1992 provides that every prisoner has the right to receive family visit, to contact friends and to meet a counsel in private. However, for many prisoners this is not the case.

- Prison authorities in Abu Dhabi have deliberately barred visitors from visiting their imprisoned family members or clients by repeatedly claiming that the phones which enable communication through the glass barriers were broken.
- The length of time for family visits has also been reduced to 15 minutes once a week and some prisoners have been banned from calls for more than 10 days.
- Defendants are often denied legal counsel and only meet their lawyers at the trial. When allowed to meet, government officials are always present in the room.

## 5. Mistreatment of British nationals

The Foreign Office officials revealed they had to deal with 43 cases relating to alleged abuse of British nationals since 2011 after being detained by police and security officials.

British businessman and lawyer David Haigh lived in Dubai for 8 years before being accused of fraud and detained for 22 months. He was tasered, hit and threatened as well as denied access to medicine, translators and lawyers. Speaking about his experience Haigh said "I was tortured and abused and witnessed countless others tortured and abused, which is something that never leaves you".