

The International Campaign for Freedom in the United Arab Emirates



QUARTERLY BRIEFING

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The past few months in the United Arab Emirates have seen no improvements in terms of the human rights situation. A number of British citizens have been detained on spurious charges; alongside this there is a growing movement calling for the UK government to redefine their relationship with the Gulf state. The detention of prisoners of conscience continues, and there are increasing reports of their deteriorating health conditions.



ICF UAE



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THE UK/UAE EXTRADITION TREATY

In light of a number of denied extradition requests there have been growing calls to suspend the extradition treaty between the UK and the UAE. It is becoming apparent that the UAE is failing to take their own extradition cases seriously by failing to provide adequate evidence in cases and, most importantly, failing to address the human rights concerns which lead to the rejection of most requests.

In July the UAE authorities attempted, and failed, to extradite a British man to the UAE on allegations of fraud. The judgment in this case stated that "the UAE has maintained a policy followed before this court in recent years, of not responding to defence expert material or providing any instructions save to insist on the pursuit of this request". The ultimate ruling provided that the defendant was at real risk of torture and human rights violations in the event that he were extradited to the UAE.

A Freedom of Information Request was recently published by the Home Office which revealed that 13 individuals were arrested during the last 5 years as a result of extradition requests from the UAE, and that all cases were subsequently discharged by the courts.

As a result of this, and the fact that the cost for processing extradition requests comes from British taxpayers' money, lawyers have called on the UK government to suspend this treaty. In addition, the lawyers maintain that the suspension of this treaty "would be a significant step towards encouraging the UAE to reform its legal and penal system and would ultimately be beneficial in promoting human rights".

DETENTION OF UK CITIZENS

In the past few months a number of British citizens have been detained in a series of bizarre arrests, revealing both the arbitrary nature of Emirati law and the lack of will on behalf of the British government to intervene in such matters.

Jamie Harron: The 27 year old Scot was arrested in July 2017 on charges of alcohol consumption and public indecency. Harron is said to have been holding his hand in front of him whilst moving through the crowded bar to avoid spilling his drink on himself or others. He then "touched a man on his hip to avoid impact". The accuser has since dropped the complaint against him; however local prosecutors pursued the case and Harron faced 3 years imprisonment before being pardoned by Sheikh Mohammed.

Harron's father commented on the lack of assistance given by UK authorities, "the UK embassy has not done anything to help and seem to think it is absolutely fine for British nationals to be abused in this way. People have to stop visiting that country. Since Jamie was arrested, I have researched and found that this is more common than any of us think. It is unacceptable the FCO actually promotes the UAE to British tourists."

Billy Barclay: This September the 31 year old from Edinburgh was stopped on his return to Dubai International Airport in September after an incident in 2016 when he tried to exchange money at the Al Hamra Mall in Ras Al Khaimah. He was detained for 3 days before being released on bail. His passport was confiscated, and he faced up to a year's imprisonment before charity Detained in Dubai successfully secured his release.

Detained in Dubai have a proven track record of securing the release of British nationals in the UAE; however, the British Foreign Office reportedly urged Barclay's family to refrain from enlisting their advice or publicising his case in the media. They suggested that talking to the media about his plight would make matters worse, whereas recent similar cases show that building a strong public campaign has been crucial to securing the release of prisoners.

Billy Barclay's partner Monique was appalled by the advice given to her by the FCO, arguing that "if we had not gotten Radha [CEO of Detained in Dubai] involved, I know Billy would still be stuck there. The advice of the FCO was clearly not what would be best for us, but only good maybe for the UAE, to keep the issue under the carpet".

THE ARMS TRADE

Between 2012 and 2016 the UAE was the world's third largest arms importer. In recent years it has been investing heavily in fighter jets, anti-missile systems and homeland security capabilities. This is due in part to its drive for influence across the Middle East and North Africa, particularly as a key partner in the Saudi led intervention in Yemen. Rights groups have called on governments to cease exporting arms to the UAE claiming that such weapons, such as assault rifles and anti-tank guided missiles (ATGMs), are responsible for human rights abuses in the Yemen conflict.

According to a report by the UN Sanctions Committee, the UAE violated a UN arms embargo on Libya after supplying sending attack helicopters, attack aircraft, and armoured vehicles to the conflict stricken country.

THE UK AND ARMS TRADE

Figures published by the UK Department for International Trade and Export Control Organisation show that in 2016 alone the UK signed off on 243 military export licences to the UAE, totalling £130,521,440 . UK exports of small arms, ammunition and armoured vehicles to the UAE have increased exponentially in the years following the onset of the Arab Spring. According to Campaign Against the Arms Trade (CAAT) "UK-made fighter jets are flying over Yemen, where they are being flown by UK-trained personnel and dropping UK-made bombs. The UK could not be any more complicit."

BAE systems is one of the main suppliers of weaponry to the UAE. A year-long investigation by BBC Arabic and a Danish newspaper uncovered evidence that BAE systems secretly sold surveillance technology to a number of repressive regimes including the UAE. A Danish subsidiary of BAE produced and exported a system known as Evident. According to the report the system is capable of intercepting traffic, pinpointing device location, decryption and voice recognition.

DETENTION OF PRISONERS OF CONSCIENCE CONTINUES

In August this year Emirati academic and prisoner of conscience Nasser bin Ghaith was moved from Al-Razeen prison to an undisclosed location by Emirati authorities. The human rights defender was sentenced to ten years in prison earlier this year for tweets that were critical of the UAE authorities.

Bin Ghaith has been denied visits from his family and legal team since beginning an open-ended hunger strike in April of this year to demand his immediate and unconditional release. It is currently unknown as to whether bin Ghaith continued his strike.

September 20th marked 6 months since the arrest of prominent human rights defender Ahmed Mansoor. Despite increasingly loud calls from various sections of the international community to do so, the UAE authorities have so far shown little sign that they intend to release the human rights activist.

Mansoor was arrested by UAE authorities on 20 March after 12 plain-clothed Emirati security officials stormed his family home in Abu Dhabi and took him to an unknown location, in an act described by UN human rights experts as a “direct attack” on human rights defenders everywhere.

On September the 21st Human Rights Watch called on the UAE authorities to release Mansoor immediately. Joe Stork, deputy Middle East director at Human Rights Watch, said “the charges submitted against Ahmad Mansoor are a violation of his right to freedom of expression.”

He added: “If the UAE is concerned about its reputation, it should immediately release him, ”explaining that such arrest evidences the government’s intolerance regarding peaceful opposition in the UAE.”

1. https://www.caat.org.uk/resources/export-licences/licence?iso2=AE&date_from=-3&rating=Military

HEALTH DETERIORATION OF PRISONERS

Recent reports suggest that the health condition of multiple prisoners in UAE jails is deteriorating. Jordanian journalist and UAE prisoner of conscience Tayseer al-Najjar was detained in 2015 after criticising the UAE authorities on social media that he made before entering the country. He suffers from kidney pains, eye problems, and sharp bone pains, which has worsened significantly as a result of not receiving adequate medical treatment in UAE's al-Wathba prison.

In addition, reports have emerged that female Emirati prisoner Alia Abdul Nour, who is suffering from cancer, has not been receiving any medical treatment to treat her chronic illness since her arrest in July 2015. She is currently serving a 10 year prison sentence after being arrested without warrant or reason.

The mistreatment of these prisoners are not isolated cases; the UAE authorities must abide by their obligations under international law to ensure that all prisoners receive adequate medical treatment and care that properly addresses their health needs during their detention. In failing to do so, the Emirati authorities stand in clear contravention of the UN's treaty regarding the Standard Minimum Rules for The Treatment of Prisoners.



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