

URGENT ACTION

UAE TWITTER ACTIVIST'S UNFAIR TRIAL CONTINUES

Osama al-Najjar is due to appear before the Federal Supreme Court in Abu Dhabi, for his second hearing on 14 October on charges stemming from his Twitter activities defending his father. If convicted, he will have no right to appeal. He is a prisoner of conscience.

Osama al-Najjar, aged 25, is next due in court on 14 October. He appeared before the State Security Chamber of the Federal Supreme Court in Abu Dhabi on 23 September for his first hearing since his arrest. He is being tried on charges including “designing and running a website on social networks with the aim of publishing inaccurate, satirical and defamatory ideas and information that are harmful to the structure of State institutions”, “belonging to the al-Islah organization” and “contacting foreign organizations and presenting inaccurate information” about the “UAE 94” trial and living conditions inside al-Razeen Prison where prisoners of conscience are held. He was only allowed to meet his lawyer for the first time at the hearing.

Osama al-Najjar was arrested on 17 March 2014 by 10 state security officers who raided his family home in Ajman emirate. Three weeks before his arrest, Osama al-Najjar had tweeted the Minister of Interior expressing concern that his father had been ill-treated in prison and asking the minister to reply to a letter he had sent him. His father, Hussain Ali al-Najjar al-Hammadi, is one of the “UAE 94” defendants. Osama al-Najjar was held in solitary confinement at a secret detention facility for four days during which he was tortured and otherwise ill-treated: he was punched on his face and hit with a cable on different parts of his body, until a wound on his leg, caused by surgery he had received the day before his arrest, began bleeding. He was then transferred to al-Wathba Prison in Abu Dhabi, where his family have visited him.

Please write immediately in Arabic, English or your own language:

- Calling on the authorities to release Osama al-Najjar immediately and unconditionally and drop the charges against him as he is a prisoner of conscience held solely for the peaceful exercise of his rights to freedom of expression and association, including his advocacy on behalf of his father;
- Urging them to protect him from torture and other ill-treatment and grant him access to his lawyer and any medical attention he may require;
- Calling on them to order an independent investigation into Osama al-Najjar’s allegations of torture and other ill-treatment, and bring those responsible to justice.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 19 NOVEMBER 2014 TO:

President

Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan
Ministry of Presidential Affairs
Corniche Road
Abu Dhabi, P.O. Box 280
United Arab Emirates
Fax: 011 971 2 622 2228
Email: ihitam@mopa.ae
Salutation: Your Highness

Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi

Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan
Crown Prince Court Bainunah Street
Abu Dhabi, P.O. Box 124
United Arab Emirates
Fax: 011 971 2 668 6622
Twitter: @MBZNews
Salutation: Your Highness

And copies to:

Minister of Interior

Lt. General Sheikh Saif bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Zayed Sport City, Arab Gulf Street, Near to Shaikh Zayed Mosque, Abu Dhabi POB: 398
Fax: 011 971 2 4414938 / +971 2 4022762 / +971 2 4415780

Contact form:

<http://moi.gov.ae/en/contactus/contactusform.aspx>
Twitter: @SaifBZayed

Also send copies to:

Ambassador Yousef Al Otaiba, Embassy of the United Arab Emirates
3522 International Court NW #400, Washington DC 20008
Fax: 1 202 243 2495 | Phone: 1 202 243 2400 | Email: info@uaeembassy-usa.org

Please let us know if you took action so that we can track our impact. Send a short email to uan@aiusa.org with “UA 61/14” in the subject line and include in the body of the email the number of letters and/or emails you sent. Thank you for taking action! Please check with the AIUSA Urgent Action Amnesty Office if sending appeals after the above date. This is the first update of UA 61/14. Further information: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE25/009/2014/en>

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Osama al-Najjar is the son of science teacher Hussain Ali al-Najjar al-Hammadi, who was one of a number of prisoners of conscience unfairly tried during the mass "UAE 94" trial in 2013. Of the 94 defendants, who included human rights lawyers, judges and student activists, 69 were convicted of national security-related charges and sentenced to between seven and 15 years' imprisonment. Hussain Ali al-Najjar al-Hammadi was sentenced to 10 years' imprisonment. He received an additional 15-month prison sentence after a second unfair trial, which convicted 10 UAE and 20 Egyptian nationals on national security-related charges.

The proceedings in both mass trials violated international fair trial standards: the defendants were denied access to lawyers while they were detained incommunicado awaiting trial; all were secretly detained, some for up to a year; many told the judge they had been tortured; "confessions" purportedly obtained while defendants were in secret detention were used as evidence of their guilt; and all were denied the right to appeal the court's verdict in contravention of international human rights standards.

Some relatives of the 69 imprisoned government critics told Amnesty International when it visited the UAE in November 2013 that they had been bullied, harassed, threatened and stigmatized by the authorities in a bid to silence their pleas for justice. They have been threatened by State Security Apparatus officials, as well as prevented from travel and have been refused security clearance for jobs. Several have received threatening tweets, either from named individuals believed to work for or connected with state security or from anonymous Twitter accounts.

Prisoners' families have been vilified by the largely pro-government national media and in a documentary about the "UAE 94", produced by an organization believed to have close links with the authorities, which was first shown at a screening on 21 November 2013 in Dubai and ignores human rights concerns about the trial.

Al-Islah (Reform and Social Guidance Association) is a well-known UAE-based civil society organization that engaged in peaceful social and political debate and which operated openly for nearly 40 years, attracting support among members of the judiciary, lawyers, university academics and others.

In her preliminary observations on the UAE on 5 February 2014, Gabriela Knaul, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers, expressed deep concerns on a number of human rights issues, including reports of surveillance, harassment, threats and pressure exerted on lawyers, and urged the authorities to take immediate measures to put an end to this situation. The Special Rapporteur also observed that the UAE judicial system remained under the de facto control of the executive branch of government. She made a series of recommendations to the UAE government, including that it must revise legislation to ensure the right of appeal in cases currently heard in first instance by the State Security Chamber of the Federal Supreme Court; establish an independent committee to investigate all allegations of torture and other ill-treatment in detention; and ratify the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and its Optional Protocols, as well as the International Convention for the Protection of all Persons from Enforced disappearance. The Special Rapporteur's preliminary observations can be found here:

<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=14223&LangID=E>

Name: Osama al-Najjar (m)

Issues: Prisoner of conscience, Unfair trial, Torture/III-treatment

Further information on UA: 61/14

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Country: United Arab Emirates