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Detainees in Al-Wathba Prison in Abu-Dhabi Send a Distress Call to save them from Coronavirus Pandemic

Leaked audio of one of the detainees“ They mixed us with infected detainees

Leaked audio: “They shaved our heads with tools without sterilisation. We live in horrible cells full of bird waste and no ventilation”

Arab Organisation for Human Rights in the UK (AOHR UK) received appeals from relatives of detainees at Al-Wathba Prison in Abu Dhabi, UAE, about the outbreak of the Coronavirus epidemic inside the prison and the infection of at least 30 detainees, while the prison administration does not taking any serious measures to protect detainees from this danger.

In her statement to AOHR UK, the mother of one of the detainees who recently developed symptoms of COVID-19: "my son told me over the phone that he had started developing symptoms of Coronavirus after the virus had spread among a number of detainees inside the prison. He suffered from shortness of breath, chest pains, dry cough, loss of appetite and smelling. He told me that the prison administration did not take any action to isolate him or examine him."

The family of another detainee held inside the same prison said: "The detention conditions inside Al-Wathba Prison help spreading the epidemic among the detainees. The prison administration did not isolate those infected whose tests were positive, and none of the prevention and social distancing measure were applied. The detainees were not given face masks until detainees were confirmed to be infected with the virus".



The family pointed out that "the detention conditions of the detainee –A- are inhuman, adding that it worsened after the spread of the epidemic globally. A is held in a cell with around 80 detainees, where water is cut off most of the time, and the temperature of the room is being changed in order to become unsuitable for the four seasons, for example; the air conditioner is opened deliberately despite the cold weather.

The roof of the rooms is made of wires where birds make their nests and live turning the cell into a bird waste place. In addition to this, cells lack the basic cleaning tools”.

AOHR UK also received a leaked audio recording from one of the detainees in prison, in which he said: "Since the Coronavirus pandemic appeared in the UAE, Major I. H., prison's head of security moved and mixed us with other wards four times, although mixing us with other wards was forbidden before, since we are political prisoners.

As a punishment, police shaved the heads of some prisoners with one shaving machine without any kind of sterilisation.

On 21 May 2020 we were mixed in a ward in which prisoners had fever, by an order of the policeman M. Z. On the pretext of examination. On this date 34 prisoners were examined and their results were negative, however they spread the virus in the ward after coming to it as other prisoners of the ward began to develop the symptoms of the disease.

On 28 May 2020 the rest of the ward's prisoners were examined. .out of 43 prisoners, 31 were positive, which means that 75% were infected with the Coronavirus, and we don't have adequate medical care or treatment.

The nurses of the prison told us that the Ministry of Health does not provide them with enough medicine, and that Al-Wathba Prison is epidemic.

Our ward is unhygienic and is covered with thin net which does not allow enough air or sunlight. Birds with their waste live on the net, over our heads.



Arab Organisation for Human Rights in the UK
المنظمة العربية لحقوق الإنسان في بريطانيا

AOHR UK stressed that the risk posed at Al-Wathba Prison is the result of the authorities' recklessness in dealing with the epidemic inside the prison, and rejecting international human rights calls to reduce the number of detainees by releasing detainees and those who have not yet been charged, as well as not taking the necessary precautions. The detainees are now facing a real disaster and the numbers of those infected with the virus is on the rise daily.

AOHR UK called on the international community to intervene immediately in order to save the lives of detainees in UAE prisons, who are in real danger with the management of a regime that has no respect for human rights.

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