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AOHR UK hosts panel of experts on the UAE's continued persecution of human rights activists.

Arab Organisation for Human Rights in the UK ([AOHR UK](#)) has hosted another successful [webinar](#), bringing together experts, policymakers, and activists from across the world to discuss the United Arab Emirates (UAE's) ongoing persecution of human rights activists in the country.

In the UAE, “the civil liberties of both citizens and non-citizens, who make up an overwhelming majority of the population, are subject to significant restrictions”, according to Freedom House. Emirati authorities routinely harass and detain human rights and pro-democracy activists, with many such activists currently held in detention, often in appalling conditions.

At least one such detainees has died whilst in custody over the last period, with [Alia Abdel Nour](#) having died of cancer in the infamous [Wathba prison](#) in 2019 following 4 years of medical neglect. Others, such as Maryam Suleiman Al-Ballushi, have been driven to a suicide attempt. And, the most prominent of human rights activists in the UAE, [Ahmed Mansoor](#), continues to be held in solitary confinement in al-Sadr prison, following his detention in 2018. Other such detainees include the lawyer Dr. Muhammad al-Rukan and academic Nasser bin Ghaith

The webinar's speakers were Raid Jarrar, Director Of Advocacy at Democracy for the Arab World Now (DAWN); Gabriel Sawma, Professor of Middle East Studies at Fairleigh Dickinson University and a former member of President Trump's Advisory Board for Middle East Affairs; Khalid Ibrahim, a co-founder of the Gulf Centre for Human Rights, and the centre's current Executive Director; Ahmed Al-Shaiba Al-Nuaimi, an Emirati rights activist; and Bill Law, the editor of Arab Digest, and a former Gulf Analyst for the BBC.



Speaking first, Mr. Jarrar said that DAWN ‘focuses on the violations that occur on the ground, but also exposing the United State’s role in supporting or aiding some of these violations by continuing military aid and political support.’

DAWN provides ‘in-depth, on-the-ground research’ into the numerous instances of injustice suffered by rights activists in the UAE, Mr. Jarrar explained. Using ‘counter-terrorism’ as a pretext, authorities in the country continue to unlawfully extend the sentences of those activists, he continued.

Professor Sawma spoke on the ‘human rights violations in the United Arab Emirates’, as based on his experience working at the heart of the US State Department. ‘Incommunicado detention, political prisoners, and so on – we all know that there are restrictions on free expression and media, on internet freedom, on peaceful protest’ in the UAE, Professor Sawma explained. And, he continued, the UAE authorities use both ‘enforced disappearances’ and ‘torture’ against those same prisoners.

‘This is an international issue that has to be dealt with by international bodies’, he said, pointing out that the Emirates is not a signatory to various UN conventions concerning citizens’ rights.

Professor Sawma ended his contribution by mentioning the possibility of the involvement of the International Criminal Court (ICC) in the UAE’s ongoing human rights abuses.

Khalid Ibrahim spoke about ‘all the detained human-rights defenders and prisoners of conscience in the UAE’, who are ‘treated worse than criminals’, he said.

‘When we speak of the UAE, we must mention the systematic targeting of human rights activists and the restriction of public freedoms. The authorities continue to refuse to release 48 prisoners of conscience despite their sentences having ended’, Mr. Ibrahim said, mentioning that those prisoners were denied compassionate release of prisoners during Eid.

‘There is a collective judgment that the UAE is brutal when it comes to human rights’, Mr. Ibrahim said. He explained the Gulf Centre for Human Rights has over the past years developed a number of legal strategies against various Emirati officials for their role in that brutality, in particular the torture of Ahmed Mansoor, who continues to be detained and denied access to medical care.



Bill Law, gave a moving testimony on behalf of his friend Ahmed Mansoor, including a reading of a poem by Mansoor himself.

Mr. Law began by criticizing what ‘the free world is allowing to happen’ in the UAE. ‘It is very hard to see a way forward, because of the way our governments support these states, because of the lucrative weapon sales’, Mr. Law said. Criticizing the cynical use of ‘terrorism’ charges and the ‘kangaroo courts’ in the UAE, Mr. Law said that the publication he edits, Arab Digest, continues to scrutinize both the UAE and the US’ relationship to the Emirates.

Mr. Law praised the ‘patriotism’ of Ahmed Mansoor’s ‘daring to speak up (...) daring to challenge these authoritarian regimes.

‘Ahmed Mansoor and his family have paid a very high price [for human-rights advocacy] going back to 2011’, Mr. Law said, before detailing the various cases of abuse that Mansoor has suffered at hands of the Emirati authorities, including unjust trials, travel bans, ‘constant harassment, and the loss of his senior role at an engineering firm. As Mansoor told Mr. Law personally, ‘if we do not speak out, who will?’

As the evening’s final speaker, Emirate activist Ahmed Al-Shaiba Al-Nuaimi spoke to the audience on his own experience of the UAE authorities’ persecution of those calling for increased democracy in the country and warned that even those Emirati nationals living and working outside the country are potential targets of monitoring, harassment, and other such abuses.

‘After 10 years of calling for [detainees’] freedom, the situation is getting worse and worse for anyone willing to speak up, Mr. Al-Nuaimi said. ‘If we talk about what is happening now, we can say this problem now extends to all the people of the UAE today, especially those people related to detainees.’

And, as Mr. Al-Nuaimi continued, ‘everything that can be controlled is under the [UAE’s] dictatorial system’. ‘What we see nowadays is that this problem is seen by the international community, but they take what the UAE government itself presents [as fact]. In the UN, are they, the activists, asked about this problem?’

‘The problem has been extended, further and further. Nowadays, no one is safe. When he or she goes to the UAE, they can be taken just for a tweet, from the airport, even



from the street.' Mr. Al-Nuaimi mentioned the case of Dr. Nasser bin al-Ghaith, a lecturer at Paris' Sorbonne, having been arrested for a single tweet concerning democracy in Egypt.

There was a [general agreement amongst the panellists](#) that the UAE authorities' actions against human-rights and pro-democracy activists in the country constitute a series of grave violations, and that the international community – including the Emirates chief allies – ought to pressure authorities there to drastically improve their treatment of such activists.

Arab Organisation for Human Rights in the UK (AOHR UK)