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Transnational Repression: Endangered Lives of Emirati Dissidents Overseas

In a critical and timely exploration of transnational repression, Arab Organisation for Human Rights in the UK ([AOHR UK](http://www.aohr.org.uk)) hosted a compelling [webinar titled "Transnational Repression: Endangered Lives of Emirati Dissidents Overseas."](#) The session was expertly moderated by Emirati Human Rights Activist, Jenan Abdulsalam Almarzooqi, whose personal insights and experience as the daughter of Emirati political detainee, Abdelsalam Darwish, brought a profound perspective to the discussions. The event took a deep dive into the multifaceted challenges faced by Emirati dissidents abroad, with insights delivered by distinguished experts on the subject.

The panel of speakers for the webinar was a stellar line-up of experts and campaigners in the realm of human rights and international affairs. Haydée Dijkstal, Barrister at 33 Bedford Row Chambers, Bill Law, Editor of Arab Digest and former BBC's Gulf affairs analyst, Ahmed AlShaibah, Emirati Human Rights Defender, Kristina Stockwood, Campaigner at GCHR, and Sevag Kechichian, Gulf Researcher at Democracy for Arab World Now (DAWN). Their collective expertise brought a depth of understanding to the ongoing issues in the UAE, highlighting the challenges and potential solutions for Emirati dissidents at risk.

In her speech, Haydée Dijkstal, a Barrister from 33 Bedford Row Chambers, voiced grave concerns over the growing trend. This issue has been most prevalent in cases of dual nationals living in their other country of citizenship. Dijkstal asserts that the UAE is extending its reach into foreign jurisdictions to repress and punish those who exercise their right to free expression by criticising the UAE government.

One notable case is that of Dr. Khalaf Alrumaithy, a Turkish and Emirati dual national who disappeared on May 9th following his arrest in Jordan on May 7th. Despite being released on bail the same day, he was rearrested and presented with an extradition



request from the UAE. His last known appearance was during a court hearing on May 9th. Dijkstal represents Dr. Alrumaithy on behalf of his family at the international level, raising his situation with the UN.

Dr. Alrumaithy's extradition request is based on his 2013 conviction in the UAE 94 case, a mass trial of 94 critics of the UAE government. The trial was widely criticised for its violation of fair trial standards and was considered a crackdown on dissent and an attack on free expression. It was marked by numerous allegations of human rights abuses including denial of representation, inability to appeal, and allegations of torture.

The mysterious circumstances surrounding Dr. Alrumaithy's disappearance and the lack of transparency from Jordanian authorities raise serious concerns. There are unconfirmed reports that Dr. Alrumaithy was sent on a private plane to the UAE, outside the standard extradition procedures, leaving his family in the dark about his status. Dijkstal fears that Dr. Alrumaithy may have been forcibly disappeared, possibly subjected to arbitrary detention and torture, based on the treatment of other co-accused in the UAE 94 case.

On May 18th, a complaint was sent to the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture, highlighting potential violations against the right to a fair trial, the right to free expression and association, and the risk of torture. Despite the UN's confirmation of receiving the complaint and examining the situation, Dijkstal calls for faster action and more transparency, noting the overwhelming urgency of the situation and the high possibility of ongoing human rights violations.

Dijkstal also emphasises the need for better communication with the affected families, as they have the right to know the truth about their loved ones' whereabouts and well-being. The case of Dr. Alrumaithy and others subjected to transnational repression underscore the need for urgent intervention and preventive measures to uphold human rights, especially for those expressing their dissent peacefully.

Dijkstal indicated that the Arab Interpol might be implicated in the case of Dr. Alrumaithy, although confirmation has yet to be secured concerning his whereabouts and the circumstances of his extradition. She emphasized the urgency for clear answers from relevant authorities, indicating that such a resolution will likely require international pressure through organizations like the UN.



The focus of these inquiries centres around the role played by the Arab Interpol and the procedures deployed during the extradition process. It's crucial, according to Dijkstal, to ensure that standard protections in extradition procedures are observed and that the fundamental rights of individuals are upheld.

Moreover, Dijkstal shed light on disturbing reports concerning individuals like Dr. Alrumaithy who are detained indefinitely under the UA94 case. Such cases, often presented to the UN Special Rapporteur, illustrate the significant human rights violations faced by these detainees. She underscored the alarming rationale used for their continued detention, such as adopting extremist thoughts warranting "counseling," with no right to appeal.

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In his speech, Bill Law, editor of Arab Digest and former BBC's Gulf affairs analyst, expressed grave concerns about human rights issues in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, including the United Arab Emirates. He discussed the distressing situation of Emirati dissident, Dr. Khalaf Alrumaithy, who has been missing for three weeks, likening it to similar cases of detained dissidents in Saudi Arabia and Bahrain.

Law raised alarm about the persistent lack of transparency and due process in these states, where individuals are being indefinitely detained in poor conditions, often without any right to appeal. Furthermore, he brought up concerns about the repressive regime in the UAE, noted for its intense surveillance and restrictions on free speech.

During his discourse, Law noted that global human rights issues are being sidelined by discussions focused predominantly on climate change, a situation that he fears might be exploited by authoritarian regimes to dodge criticism of their human rights



records. Drawing attention to the upcoming COP 28 climate summit in Dubai, he warned about the potential for climate change discourse to overshadow traditional human rights issues.

Law believes that the time is pressing for human rights activists to engage with climate change activists to ensure a holistic approach to human rights, encompassing not only the right to clean air and water, but also basic freedoms like the right to free speech and a fair trial.

Additionally, Law criticized the silence of liberal democracies, such as Canada and the UK, on these pressing human rights issues. He believes that governments have been muting their concerns due to a fear of infringing on the sovereignty of other nations. Furthermore, he expressed concerns about the influence of Gulf states on these countries through strategic investment and infiltration in think tanks and academic institutions.

In conclusion, Law emphasized the urgency of finding a way to confront these issues, cautioning against the authoritarian drift witnessed globally. He called for a united front of climate and human rights activists to ensure a comprehensive discussion on human rights before the upcoming COP 28 summit in Dubai.

In his speech, Emirati human rights defender Ahmed AlShaibah, gave a chilling account of the harsh realities faced by human rights defenders in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). AlShaibah detailed several instances of transnational repression, including the kidnapping of a fellow dissident, highlighting how the UAE authority uses its wealth and power to violate international laws.

AlShaibah condemned the UAE authority for using what he described as "dirty money" to act against human rights defenders in foreign countries, alluding to cases in Jordan and Indonesia where UAE citizens were allegedly kidnapped with the cooperation of local authorities.

The human rights defender further highlighted the dangers faced by Emiratis who stand up for their rights, both inside and outside the UAE. He recounted his personal ordeal, wherein his disabled son Mohammed was left behind in the UAE when his family had to escape. After struggling for several years to bring his son to the UK, AlShaibah eventually received news in 2021 that his son had passed away. He



criticised the UAE authority for its lack of mercy and disregard for human rights, even when dealing with disabled individuals.

AlShaibah also raised concerns about the UAE's seemingly limitless capacity for human rights violations. He highlighted the case of a UAE national who was persecuted through Interpol, rather than the legal system, a move he deemed in contravention of the legal system.

The Emirati activist expressed his worry about the future, citing the UAE's recent attempts to influence international organisations and councils. He was particularly critical of the UAE's appointment to chair the anti-terrorism committee and Security Council, considering their alleged support for terrorist activities worldwide.

In a concluding note, AlShaibah shed light on the UAE's use of indefinite detention. He detailed the existence of the "Almunasaha Centre" or "Counselling Centre," which allegedly extends imprisonment indefinitely, disregarding the legal system. He claimed that some detainees had completed their sentences four to five years ago yet remained imprisoned with no clear justification. He emphasised that the authority's power seemingly supersedes the judgment of the courts, flagrantly violating the rights of prisoners.

Throughout his address, AlShaibah called for global awareness of the UAE's human rights abuses, urging participants to consider how to halt the escalating cycle of violence and discrimination. He thanked the attendees for providing a platform to share his story and shed light on the pervasive human rights issues in the UAE.

In her speech, Kristina Stockwood, the Campaigner and Fundraising & Development Manager at Gulf Centre for Human Rights, made some powerful revelations about human rights violations in the United Arab Emirates.

Stockwood highlighted the disturbing case of UAE detainee Abdulsalam Darwish, expressing deep concern over the persistent threats and intimidation faced by his daughter, who was forced to flee the country in 2016. After the tragic death of another human rights defender, Al Sadiq, the daughter of a detained prisoner of conscience, Darwish's daughter received further threats online, illustrating the far-reaching influence of Emirati authorities.

The human rights defender painted a bleak picture of the situation in the UAE, where activists either find themselves in jail or are forced into exile. She expressed



condolences for Ahmed, a fellow participant in the webinar who has faced a similar situation and whose son was tragically killed.

Stockwood urged attendees to keep an eye on their Alternative Human Rights Expo, an event aimed at highlighting the work of Emirati activists. This initiative aims to raise awareness about human rights violations in the UAE in the lead-up to COP 28.

Additionally, Stockwood drew attention to the alarming lack of freedom in the UAE, stating that dissent, even in the form of online petitions or tweets, is not tolerated. The dire situation has seen activists like her colleague Ahmed Mansour imprisoned for six years for their online activities.

To conclude, Stockwood highlighted the harrowing experience of Arthur Lee Gaska, a Polish prisoner who endured torture and abuse in the Emirates before his death. Before passing away, Gaska managed to publish several books about his experiences, contributing to the global understanding of the human rights situation in the UAE.

Adding to this, Stockwood revealed how her colleague the Bahraini Maryam Alkhawajah, also a co-founder, is unable to travel to many countries in the Arab region due to fear of arrest, reflecting the pervasive reach of UAE repression.

Stockwood challenged the prevalent perception of the UAE as a luxurious tourist destination, stressing that numerous foreigners have been arrested and tortured in the country. She urged people to be aware that places like Dubai may not be as safe as they seem.

In his speech, a Gulf Researcher at Democracy for the Arab World Now (DAWN), presented a grim forecast for human rights, with an increasing impact on climate justice and rights caused by climate change. He particularly highlighted the rapidly growing influence of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) on the global stage, largely fueled by its energy, oil wealth, technological investments, and business interests in the West.

Kechichian explained that climate change, specifically the move away from fossil fuels, presents an existential threat to the power of oil-rich nations like the UAE and Saudi Arabia. With oil serving as a primary source of their global power and influence, any shift towards alternative energies could undermine their current position.



The researcher further emphasized that the aftermath of the Arab Spring has seen an escalating trend of transnational repression, as nations crack down on calls for liberties, democracy, human rights, and accountability. This repression, he warned, is poised to increase as nations like the UAE invest heavily in surveillance technologies, targeting dissidents both at home and abroad.

The advent of social media and digital platforms has also compounded this issue, shifting the battleground to these virtual spaces. This change, according to Kechichian, has necessitated an excessive investment in surveillance technologies by the UAE.

While these countries maintain a stance of sovereignty, arguing against foreign interference in their affairs, they simultaneously invest in tools of transnational repression to target activists worldwide. Kechichian labeled this as a contradiction, condemning the ongoing silencing of activists in other sovereign states through intimidation, harassment, and collective punishment of family members.

He noted that more needs to be done. Human rights organizations need to place a greater emphasis on climate issues, and Western citizens must hold their legislative representatives accountable to both local and international laws. This includes preventing ex-government officials from leveraging their public service knowledge and expertise to support repression and authoritarianism in other countries. The fight against transnational repression, Kechichian concluded, continues.

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