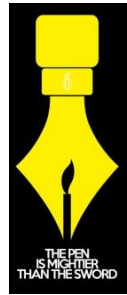




Amnesty International

Group 524

July 2019



Next Meeting: Tuesday, June 16 – 7:00 p.m. – Providence Heights

United Arab Emirates: Calling for Release of Prominent Human Rights Leader

Summarizing the human rights situation in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Amnesty began the UAE chapter of its world report with these words:

Space for civil society remained nearly non-existent in the UAE, with the country's most well-known human rights activist behind bars ...

This month we have the opportunity to participate in an Urgent Action, writing letters calling for the release of that human rights leader, **Ahmed Mansoor**. See Pages 2 and 3.

United States: "Saving Lives is NOT a Crime"

Beginning on Page 4, we have information on an Amnesty International report that was released less than two weeks ago. In addition to the press release describing the report, we have links to the report itself, and to a commentary about a related case.

The first sentence of the Amnesty report says a lot:

Amnesty International has found since 2018 that the US government has executed an unlawful and politically motivated campaign of intimidation, threats, harassment, and criminal investigations against people who defend the human rights of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers on the US–Mexico border.

July 16 at Providence Heights

We don't have any news from Vietnam concerning **Thich Quang Do** or **Nguyen Van Hoa** (see June newsletter). In the signing we will do on July 16, they will be included, along with **Ahmed Mansoor** of the UAE.

We hope you can join us at the meeting!

Amnesty International Group 524

Meeting Schedule: Third Tuesday of the month, at 7:00 p.m.

Meeting Location: Providence Heights
9000 Babcock Blvd., Allison Park, PA 15101



Contact John Warren (jf.warren@verizon.net or 412-766-2506) for more information on material in this mailing, or visit the Amnesty USA website (www.amnestyusa.org) or the website of Amnesty International Group 39 (amnestypgh.org).

United Arab Emirates: Overview and Location within the Region

Here is the opening paragraph of Amnesty’s report on the UAE. Human Rights Watch, in its report on the UAE, noted some of the same problems, but also emphasized that the UAE “plays a leading role in the Saudi-led coalition which has carried out scores of unlawful attacks in Yemen, some likely war crimes.”

Space for civil society remained nearly non-existent in the UAE, with the country’s most well-known human rights activist behind bars, and high levels of fear dissuading victims of human rights violations and dissidents from speaking out. Arbitrary detention of foreign nationals was frequently reported. Women continued to face discrimination in law and in practice. The authorities introduced several labor reforms likely to be of benefit to migrant workers, but other policies left them vulnerable to exploitation. The authorities continued to deny nationality to thousands of individuals born within the UAE’s borders, effectively rendering them stateless. Some detainees were held incommunicado and in undisclosed locations for weeks or months. Courts handed down death sentences; no executions were reported.

This map shows the UAE (at the eastern end of the Persian Gulf) in relation to its neighbors.



*From the Urgent Action, here is some background on **Ahmed Mansoor**.*

Ahmed Mansoor is a blogger, a poet and a prominent human rights defender who received the prestigious Martin Ennals Award for Human Rights Defenders in 2015. He is a member of the advisory committee of Human Rights Watch’s Middle East and North Africa Division, as well as of the advisory board of the organization Gulf Centre for Human Rights (GCHR). He has documented the human rights situation in the UAE since 2006, and has publicly spoken out in defense of human rights on his blog, via social media, and in interviews with international media.

Ahmed Mansoor is a long-standing trusted friend of Amnesty International and other human rights organizations. Amnesty International has worked very closely with him over the years, relying on his insight and information when the UAE began its choking of civil society in the country. Up until his arrest, he was one of the only independent voices still speaking out through his blog and Twitter account against human rights violations from inside the country. Since then, very little reliable information on the human rights situation in the UAE has filtered through.

United Arab Emirates: Urgent Action with Model Letter

Here is Amnesty's model letter for this action.

Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan
Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi
Crown Prince Court
King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz Al Saud Street
P.O. Box 124
Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates



Your Excellency:

In mid-April 2019, human rights defender and prisoner of conscience **Ahmed Mansoor** ended a month-long hunger strike. Since then, his detention conditions have slightly improved. He has been allowed a few more family visits and was also granted a phone call to his mother. On 17 March 2019, Ahmed started a hunger strike to protest against his detention conditions in Sadr prison in Abu Dhabi, and his unfair trial.

However, Ahmed remains held in solitary confinement, without a bed or access to running water, since his arrest on 20 March 2017. The UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (the Nelson Mandela Rules) state that solitary confinement for more than 15 days can amount to torture or other ill-treatment.

On 7 May 2019, seven UN experts condemned Ahmed Mansoor's prison conditions and called for him to receive medical treatment, for his detention conditions to be improved, and for his retrial "in accordance with the fundamental judicial guarantees provided for in international human rights law, or his immediate release."

I urge you to quash Ahmed Mansoor's conviction and sentence, and release him immediately and unconditionally, as he is a prisoner of conscience detained solely for peacefully exercising his right to freedom of expression, including through his human rights work.

Pending his release, I call on you to ensure that he is detained in conditions that comply with international law and standards; that he is not subjected to torture or other ill-treatment; and has immediate and regular access to his family and any healthcare he may require.

cc: Ambassador Yousef Al Otaiba
Embassy of the United Arab Emirates
3522 International Court NW
Suite 400
Washington, DC 20008

United States: Amnesty Issues New Report

‘SAVING LIVES IS NOT A CRIME’

POLITICALLY MOTIVATED LEGAL HARASSMENT AGAINST MIGRANT HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS BY THE USA

On July 2, Amnesty introduced an important new report with the press release below. At the end of the press release is a link to the full report, and another link to a commentary about one case which exemplifies the harassment described in the Amnesty report.

Since 2018, the US government has conducted an unlawful and discriminatory campaign of intimidation, threats, harassment, and criminal investigations against people who defend the human rights of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers on the US–Mexico border, Amnesty International said in a new report released today.

‘Saving Lives is not a Crime’: Politically Motivated Legal Harassment of Migrant Human Rights Defenders by the USA reveals how the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and the Department of Justice (DOJ) have increasingly misused the criminal justice system to deter activists, lawyers, journalists, and humanitarian volunteers from challenging – or simply documenting – the systematic human rights violations that US authorities have committed against migrants and asylum seekers.

“The Trump administration’s targeting of human rights defenders through discriminatory misuse of the criminal justice system sets it on a slippery slope toward authoritarianism. The US government is disgracing itself by threatening and even prosecuting its own citizens for their vital work to save the lives of people in a desperate situation at the border,” said Erika Guevara-Rosas, Americas director at Amnesty International.

The US government has inappropriately investigated human rights defenders for alleged crimes including human smuggling, based on their humanitarian and human rights-related activities, and their expression of political or other opinions. While the most sweeping investigations targeted human rights defenders supporting a large caravan of migrants and asylum seekers in November 2018, authorities have continued to target those and other defenders since then, including simply for helping asylum seekers to know their rights and request protection at an official port of entry.

US authorities have subjected human rights defenders to warrantless surveillance, interrogations, invasive searches, travel restrictions, and, in isolated cases, a false arrest and unlawful detention. In so doing, they have violated the Constitution, US and international law, and DHS policies – all of which prohibit discriminatory restrictions of freedom of speech and expression. In some cases, US and Mexican authorities have reportedly collaborated in the unlawful restrictions against human rights defenders on their shared border.



United States: Amnesty Issues New Report (continued)

Amnesty International interviewed 23 human rights defenders, who detailed the restrictions they have faced because of their professional activities. Ten of them – five activists, three lawyers, a journalist and a clergy member – were included on a DHS surveillance watch list, as part of a dubious criminal investigation into human smuggling. They provided similar accounts of how US authorities have used the border region as a criminal dragnet, exploiting their authority to conduct warrantless searches, interrogate travelers about their finances and professional networks, and search their electronic devices – apparently seeking to build criminal cases against them.

“In recent days, President Trump has threatened to arrest and deport millions of people residing irregularly in the USA, including those whose family members are US citizens. Who will authorities target next with spurious charges of smuggling, simply for seeking to support communities who are under attack?” said Guevara-Rosas.

“The Trump administration must immediately end its politically motivated misuse of the criminal justice system and its abuse of powers to search, detain and interrogate human rights defenders at the border. Instead of targeting lawyers, journalists, and activists for trying to stop human rights violations, the government should be listening to them.”

So far this year, US authorities have criminally prosecuted nine humanitarian volunteers from the organization No More Deaths/No Más Muertes, for their provision of humanitarian aid to migrants and asylum seekers on the border of Arizona with Mexico, where thousands of people have died over the last two decades.

Among the most serious charges, Dr. Scott Warren was prosecuted for alleged crimes of harboring and conspiracy to transport two migrants, simply for providing them with water, food, and medical assistance in the desert town of Ajo, where he lives. The case ended in a mistrial on June 11, yet federal prosecutors have still not yet dropped the charges against Dr. Warren. [Note: The charges against Dr. Warren have now been re-filed, and a new trial has been scheduled to begin in November.]

“Humanitarian volunteers have been saving the lives of migrants and asylum seekers for years, in hostile desert terrain that authorities have weaponized against migrants with deadly effects. The US government must immediately drop all charges against Dr. Warren and adopt and implement exemptions from criminal prosecution in all situations involving the provision of humanitarian aid,” said Guevara-Rosas.

Here is the full report:

https://www.amnestyusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Amnesty-Report_SLINAC_FINAL005.pdf

This commentary from The Guardian discusses the Scott Warren case:

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/jun/16/humanitarian-activist-migrants-scott-warren>

China: Memory of Liu Xiaobo Continues to Inspire Activists

*Two years ago, Nobel Peace Prize winner **Liu Xiaobo** died in a Chinese prison. Yaqui Wang, a researcher for Human Rights Watch, wrote this commentary in his memory.*

Nobel Winner Liu Xiaobo's Spirit Lives On

Two years since Chinese Nobel Peace laureate **Liu Xiaobo** died from complications of liver cancer while guarded by state security on July 13, 2017, the Chinese government has neither investigated nor taken responsibility for the circumstances of his death. Instead, it has intensified repression of the human rights activists who carry on his legacy – a grim reality marked just this week by the death of Ji Sizun after another baseless imprisonment.



A few recent examples: in April, a Sichuan court handed down a three-and-a-half-year prison sentence to activist Chen Bing for producing and selling a liquor in commemoration of the 1989 Tiananmen Massacre. In May, Sichuan police detained Deng Chuanbin, an independent filmmaker, for tweeting a photo of the liquor. In June, Guangdong police detained rights activist Ling Haobo after Ling called on Twitter for Deng's release.

This July also marks the fourth anniversary of the “709” crackdown: on July 9, 2015, Chinese police rounded up and interrogated about 300 rights lawyers, legal assistants, and activists across the country. Despite sustaining physical ailments and mental trauma as a result of torture by authorities, many continued their fight upon release. The lawyers pledged in a statement released ahead of the anniversary that they would “calmly face the suppression, persecution, detention and even prison sentences” for “pursuing freedom, equity, and justice.”

The activists and lawyers are not naïve about the possible consequences of their actions. Rather – as they often tell me – they feel compelled to act by their anger over injustices, their compassion for victims of abuses, and their friendships with fellow activists and lawyers.

Activists have also expressed a desire to honor the life and legacy of Liu Xiaobo – a friend, a mentor, and a towering figure in China's human rights movement. In his article commemorating Liu, dissident writer Mo Zhixu mused: “It wasn't through his direct urging and pushing that Xiaobo influenced me, but through his existence itself... He was an example, a role model.”

“Freedom of expression is... the source of humanity and the mother of truth,” Liu Xiaobo said. Such unyielding faith in the intrinsic meaning of pursuing freedom inspires activists across China at a time of severe government repression – and it will live on.