



The Law Society of
Upper Canada

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Public Statement

The Law Society of Upper Canada expresses grave concerns about the arrest, detention, trial and conviction of human rights lawyers Dr. Mohamed al-Mansoori and Dr. Mohamed ‘Abdullah al-Roken, lawyer Salem al-Shehhi, Judge Mohammed Saeed al-Abdouli and other human rights defenders and activists in the United Arab Emirates

Toronto – The Law Society of Upper Canada* condemns the arrests, torture and imprisonment of lawyers and activists in the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

On July 2, 2013, the verdict was handed down in the case of 94 government critics in the UAE, who have been on trial since March 4, 2013. According to recent reports, the UAE State Security Court sentenced 68 of the 94 critics for allegedly “plotting to overthrow the state”. While the details of the verdict are not yet known, those convicted include prominent human rights lawyers Dr. Mohamed al-Mansoori and Dr. Mohamed ‘Abdullah al-Roken, who were sentenced to 10 years in prison. Many of the defendants are believed to be members of the Reform and Social Guidance Association (al-Islah), a peaceful group that advocates for greater adherence to Islamic precepts. Al-Islah has never been known to use or advocate the use of any violence.

At least 64 of the defendants were arrested and held in undisclosed locations for up to a year prior to the trial, some in extended periods of solitary confinement. Reports indicate that at least some of them had also been subjected to torture and ill-treatment while in custody. Many of the defendants were also denied legal assistance for several months. When they eventually did see a lawyer, the meeting was conducted in the presence of a representative of the State Security Prosecutor, contrary to UAE law.

In addition to human rights lawyers Dr. Mohamed al-Mansoori and Dr. Mohamed ‘Abdullah al-Roken, those on trial included lawyer Salem al-Shehhi and Judge Mohammed Saeed al-Abdouli. Reports indicate that these individuals were being held solely on account of their defence work as lawyers, and other peaceful human rights activities. They have all been previously persecuted by UAE authorities for the legitimate exercise of their professional duties and human rights work.

The trial of the 94 defendants has been plagued by allegations of unfairness and a lack of due process. Independent observers, international media as well as relatives of the defendants were barred from attending the trial. The lawyers for the defendants further identified that their case files had been tampered with. Such proceedings do not meet international fair trial standards.

This case is part of a widespread crackdown on fundamental freedoms in the UAE, resulting in the harassment, arrest, torture and imprisonment of hundreds of people and their families. Several human rights organizations have condemned the UAE’s ongoing repression of human rights lawyers and defenders during the discharge of their legitimate, peaceful legal duties and human rights work, as well as the UAE’s lack of adherence to international fair trial standards.

International human rights instruments, including the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* and the *United Nations Basic Principles*

on the Independence of the Judiciary, state that judicial independence and respect for human rights are essential to advancing the rule of law.

The Law Society urges the authorities in the United Arab Emirates to:

- a. drop all charges against human rights defenders and activists that relate solely to the peaceful exercise of the right to freedom of expression and association;
- b. unconditionally and immediately release all detainees, including Dr. Mohamed al-Mansoori, Dr. Mohamed 'Abdullah al-Roken, Salem al-Shehhi and Mohammed Saeed al-Abdouli, that are detained because of the peaceful exercise of the right to freedom of expression and association;
- c. ensure that all detainees are protected from torture and ill-treatment while in custody and have access to their families and all necessary medical treatment;
- d. ensure that independent and impartial investigations are promptly opened into all allegations of torture and other ill-treatment;
- e. ensure that all lawyers can carry out their peaceful and legitimate activities without intimidation, harassment, fear of physical violence or other human rights violations;
- f. conform in all circumstances with the provisions of the *United Nations Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers* and the *Declaration on Human Rights Defenders*; and
- g. ensure in all circumstances respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms in accordance with international human rights standards and international instruments ratified by the UAE.

**The Law Society of Upper Canada is the governing body for some 44,400 lawyers and 5,100 paralegals in the Province of Ontario, Canada, and the Treasurer is the head of the Law Society. The mandate of the Law Society is to govern the legal profession in the public interest by upholding the independence, integrity and honour of the legal profession for the purpose of advancing the cause of justice and the rule of law.*

The Law Society urges the legal community to intervene in support of members of the legal profession in United Arab Emirates in their effort to advance the respect of human rights and to promote the rule of law.

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