

**STATEMENT**

Paris, February 16, 2021

**UN Statement on Human Rights Defenders Confirms Concerns Expressed  
by Joint Statement from UIA-IROL and Other Legal Organisations and NGOs**

On February 10, 2021, the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders, Ms Mary Lawlor, expressed her fear that three human rights defenders serving 10-year prison sentences in the United Arab Emirates are being mistreated in conditions that may amount to torture. She urged authorities to release them<sup>1</sup>.

Those three human rights defenders are Mohammed Al-Roken, Ahmed Mansoor and Nasser Bin Ghaith.

Dr. Al-Roken was arrested on July 17, 2012 as part of the massive crackdown of the 'UAE94 Group', and he was charged with conspiracy against the government. These charges were levied after he called for political reforms in the country and signed an online reform petition in March 2011 to demand an elected national council with full supervisory and legislative powers. Following his arrest, he was detained in solitary confinement at an undisclosed location for 8 months, without access to his lawyer or his family.

On November 22, 2013, the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention issued an opinion recognizing the arbitrary nature of the detention of Dr. Al-Roken and 60 other defendants in the 'UAE94' trial ([A/HRC/WGAD/2013/60](https://www.hrc.org/docs/default-source/wgad/2013/2013060.pdf)).

Dr. Al-Roken has advocated to halt the violation of human rights and encouraged the government to join International covenants, agreements and related protocols protecting human rights. Moreover, he provided legal assistance to victims of human rights violations in the United Arab Emirates, including to other human rights defenders. In recognition of his courageous human rights work, Dr. Al-Roken was awarded the 2017 Ludovic-Trarieux International Human Rights Prize.

Ms Lawlor noted that *"(i)ssuing long-term prison sentences to human rights defenders, in connection to their human rights work, is a practice that cannot continue, and is an issue I will be prioritising during my mandate"*.

She further stated *"(i)ssuing 10-year prison sentences to defenders in connection to their human rights work is not only an attempt to silence them and their efforts, but also an attempt to intimidate and deter others from engaging in this legitimate work, at a crucial time in the UAE when fundamental freedoms are undermined and civic space continues to shrink"*.

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<sup>1</sup> See <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=26735&LangID=E>. The expert's call has been endorsed by Members of the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention Leigh Toomey (Chair-Rapporteur), Elina Steinerte (Vice-Chair), Miriam Estrada-Castillo, Mumba Malila, Seong-Phil Hong and Mr. Nils Melzer, Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

She called on the Emirati authorities to ensure that these human rights defenders be released from detention, in order to continue their meaningful and necessary human rights work.

UIA-IROL shares Ms. Lawlor's concerns and wholly supports and reiterates Ms Lawlor's demand that Dr. Al-Roken and other human rights defenders be released immediately. In this regard, UIA-IROL calls attention to its previously expressed concerns, published in a joint statement with multiple international organizations<sup>2</sup>, urging the UAE authorities to immediately and unconditionally release Dr. Mohammed Al-Roken and take all necessary measures to guarantee the physical and psychological integrity and security of Dr. Mohammed Al-Roken.

**UIA-IROL will continue to closely monitor the situation of Dr Al-Roken.**

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#### **More about the UIA-IROL**

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*The Institute for the Rule of Law of the International Association of Lawyers (UIA-IROL) promotes the Rule of Law and supports and defends, in particular, (1) lawyers, judges and human rights defenders who are harassed, threatened and/or persecuted in the exercise of their professions, (2) the independence of the legal and judicial professions, and (3) the UN Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers, especially in defense of human rights.*

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<sup>2</sup> See <https://www.uianet.org/en/actions/joint-statement-uae-call-release-human-rights-defender-and-lawyer-dr-mohammed-al-roken>