

Urgent Action Office 3-1992 Yonge Street Toronto ON M4S 1Z7 Phone: (416) 363-9933 Fax: (416) 363-3103 urgentaction@amnesty.ca

UA 183/15, **UPDATE 6**, AI Index: MDE 25/9621/2018 of 20 December 2018
The original index number is MDE 25/2299/2015 of 19 August 2015.

UNITED ARAB EMIRATES HUNGER-STRIKING ACADEMIC IN CRITICAL CONDITION

Dr Nasser bin Ghaith's health has severely deteriorated. The prominent Emirati economist and academic has been on hunger strike for over 70 days in al-Razeen prison in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) to protest the detention conditions and the denial of access to medical care. He is a prisoner of conscience.

Human rights defender Dr Nasser bin Ghaith who is detained in the high security al-Razeen Prison, in the middle of the Abu Dhabi Desert, has been on hunger strikes for various lengths of time since 7 October 2018. For over 70 days he has only eaten a small amount of food a handful of times and his health has severely deteriorated. He is protesting the prison authorities' ill-treatment of detainees, including denial of access to medical care and inconsistency of family visits. Prior to his arrest and detention, Dr Nasser bin Ghaith already suffered from high blood pressure, which has resulted in cardiomegaly (enlargement of the heart) and early-stage fatty liver disease. According to reliable information, he has now lost much of his sight and is too weak to stand up and walk unaided as a result of his hunger strike. Dr Nasser bin Ghaith is also demanding his own release following the presidential pardon granted to British academic Matthew Hedges on 26 November 2018, a week after he was sentenced to life in prison on spying charges.

Dr Nasser bin Ghaith is serving a 10-year prison sentence handed to him on 29 March 2017 by the Federal Appeal Court in Abu Dhabi, the UAE's capital. He was convicted on charges including "posting false information" about UAE leaders and their policies, based on comments he made on Twitter stating that his trial was unfair in the "UAE 5" case that included four other Emiratis. Dr Nasser bin Ghaith has also been convicted of "communicating and co-operating with members of the banned al-Islah organization", in connection with meetings he had with individuals allegedly linked to the organization.

Please respectfully insist that the authorities

- * quash Dr Nasser bin Ghaith's conviction and sentence and release him immediately and unconditionally, as he is a prisoner of conscience detained solely for peacefully exercising his rights to freedom of expression, association, and assembly;
- * protect him from torture and other ill-treatment;
- * order an independent and effective investigation into his allegations of enforced disappearance, torture and other ill-treatment;
- * transfer Dr Nasser bin Ghaith to a hospital where he can receive appropriate medical care from independent health professionals.

Address your requests to

Vice-President and Prime Minister

HH Sheikh Mohammed Bin

Rashid al-Maktoum

Prime Minister's Office

PO Box 212000

Dubai, United Arab Emirates

Fax: 011 971 4 330 4044

Via website: <https://uaecabinet.ae/en/contact-the-prime-minister>

Twitter: @HHShkMohd

Salutation: Your Highness

Minister of Interior

Sheikh Saif bin Zayed Al Nahyan

Zayed Sport City, Arab Gulf Street, Near to Shaikh Zayed Mosque

PO Box 398

Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates

Fax: 011 971 2 402 2762 or 011 971 2 441 5780

Salutation: Your Highness

Please send a copy to

His Excellency Fahad Saeed M. A. Alraqbani

Ambassador for the United Arab Emirates

125 Boteler Street

Ottawa, Ontario K1N 0A4

Fax: 613 565 8007

Phone: 613 565 7272

Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi

HH Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan

Crown Prince Court

King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz Al Saud Street

P.O. Box 124

Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates

Fax: 011 971 2 668 6622

Twitter: @MohamedBinZayed



Dr Nasser bin Ghaith

Additional information

In 2011, Dr Nasser bin Ghaith and four Emirati activists, including human rights defender Ahmed Mansoor (in a case known as the "UAE 5") were unfairly tried for statements made online calling for economic, political and social reforms in the UAE. On 27 November 2011,

they were convicted of “publicly insulting” the UAE’s President, Vice-President and Crown Prince. Dr Nasser bin Ghaith was sentenced to two years in prison. The next day, he and the other four activists received a presidential pardon.

On 18 August 2015, Dr Nasser bin Ghaith was arrested by UAE State Security at his place of work and subjected to enforced disappearance. On 4 April 2016, he was seen for the first time since his disappearance, when he was brought before the State Security Chamber of the Federal Supreme Court for the beginning of his trial. His charges included “posting false information” about UAE leaders and their policies, based on comments he made on Twitter stating that he had not been given a fair trial in the “UAE 5” case. Dr Nasser bin Ghaith was convicted of “communicating and co-operating with members of the banned al-Islah organization, in connection with meetings he had with individuals allegedly linked to the organization. During his first two trial hearings, Dr Nasser bin Ghaith told the court that he had been kept in secret detention and subjected to beatings and deliberate sleep deprivation for nearly eight months. The judge dismissed his claims and refused to order an independent investigation into his allegations of torture and ill-treatment. In addition to the charges listed above, Dr Nasser bin Ghaith was also convicted of “committing a hostile act against a foreign state”, in relation to comments he made on Twitter criticizing the Egyptian government, in addition to “offensively criticizing the construction of a Hindu temple in Abu Dhabi and inciting UAE citizens against their leaders and government” in reference to a tweet which he told the court had been misinterpreted and had been intended to promote tolerance. He was not able to prepare an effective defence as the Emirati authorities had restricted his access to his lawyer.

Amnesty International has documented allegations of ill-treatment and torture at the high security al-Razeen Prison, situated in the middle of the Abu Dhabi desert and effectively under the control of the State Security. On 11 November 2015, human rights defender and prisoner of conscience, Dr Mohammed al-Roken, was awoken in his cell at al-Razeen prison by blaring music. In August 2013, 18 prisoners went on hunger strike in protest at their treatment by the prison authorities, including beatings by prison guards, restrictions on family visits, and being kept in darkness. Three of them collapsed after the prison authorities had deliberately turned off air-conditioning when the weather was hot. At least 10 prisoners of conscience were ill-treated in al-Razeen Prison in June 2014. Prisoners and their families have said that the political prisoners in al-Razeen Prison are specifically discriminated against. The prisoners have complained to the authorities about their conditions, but with no discernible results. In March 2014, the families of prisoners held at al-Razeen Prison addressed a joint letter to Abu Dhabi’s Attorney General, asking that he investigates alleged abuses against the prisoners. They received no response.

In parallel, British national Matthew Hedges, a PhD student at Durham University, has been released following a presidential pardon on 26 November 2018. He was arrested on 5 May 2018 at Dubai International Airport as he was leaving the UAE following a research trip. After his arrest he was taken to a prison in Abu Dhabi and held in solitary confinement for five months. On 21 November, he was sentenced to life in prison, for spying on the UAE.