

# [Rights defenders jailed in Bahrain and UAE should be released unconditionally, UN urges](#)

The UN human rights office, [OHCHR](#), has [called](#) for the immediate release of a prominent human rights defender in Bahrain, after the country's highest court rejected a final appeal for his release on Monday. Nabeel Rajab was jailed in 2016 for tweeting criticism of Saudi Arabia's airstrikes on Yemen and allegations of torture inside one of Bahrain's prisons.

"We urge the Government of Bahrain to stop criminalizing dissenting voices," the statement read. Mr. Rajab's comments online were made in 2015, when Saudi Arabia formed a coalition siding with the pro-Government fight in Yemen against Houthi rebels.

One tweet read, "we have the right to say no to the war in #Yemen and should struggle for peace and security but not bloodshed #Sanaa." He also criticized conditions inside Bahrain's Jau Prison, which are notoriously poor.

Rajab was convicted on charges of "spreading false news and rumors in time of war", "insulting foreign countries" and "insulting publicly the interior ministry".

OHCHR Spokesperson, Ravina Shamdasani, briefing reporters at the UN in Geneva, urged the Government of Bahrain "to ensure that all Bahrainis are able to exercise their rights to freedom of opinion and expression without fear of arbitrary detention." The [UN Working Group of Arbitrary Detention](#) last year declared Rajab's detention to be arbitrary.

Monday's court decision brings into focus the tight lid on Government critics in Bahrain, the Spokesperson said, evidenced by targeted arrests, detention, travel bans, harassment, threats, revocation of citizenship and other means.

Several cases of civil society activists and their families suffering retaliation in Bahrain for seeking to engage with UN human rights officials are highlighted in the Secretary-General's latest annual [report on reprisals](#), and in some cases, activists have been accused of terrorism-related offences.

Prosecution for exercising fundamental human rights violates Bahrain's obligations under the [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#), which includes freedom of expression under the human rights umbrella, said OHCHR.

## **United Arab Emirates also urged to release defender jailed for tweeting**

In the United Arab Emirates (UAE), rights advocate Ahmed Mansoor faces a 10-

year sentence on similar charges – social media posts deemed insulting to the Government.

The Court of State Security, the highest in the country, upheld the rights defender's sentence on 31 December, and issued a one-million dirham fine; roughly \$272,000.

In May 2018, Mr. Mansoor was jailed along with four others, following the comments, accused of using social media to “publish false information” that harms “national unity” and damages “the country's reputation.”

Ms. Shamdasani said the conviction was another case of “harsh sentencing” for Mr. Mansoor, related to “his exercise of the right to freedom of expression and opinion.”

“We urge the Government of the UAE to promptly and unconditionally release Mansoor and to ensure that individuals are not penalized for expressing views critical of the Government or its allies,” she said in a briefing [statement](#) to reporters.

The number of reprisals against those who cooperate with the United Nations and work to uphold human rights highlighted in the UN Chief's annual report, exposes a “shameful” level of retaliation suffered in 38 countries, some of which are members of the Human Rights Council.

Acts of retaliation, including allegations of killing, torture, and public stigmatization campaigns, the report shows, inhibit the work of the UN and its partner organizations.