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TEXTS ADOPTED

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**P9\_TA(2021)0390**

**The case of human rights defender Ahmed Mansoor in UAE**

**European Parliament resolution of 16 September 2021 on the case of human rights defender Ahmed Mansoor in the United Arab Emirates (2021/2873(RSP))**

*The European Parliament,*

- having regard to having regard to its previous resolutions on the United Arab Emirates (UAE), in particular its resolution of 4 October 2018 on the UAE, notably the situation of human rights defender Ahmed Mansoor<sup>1</sup>,
- having regard to the statement of 10 December 2020 by Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (VP/HR) Josep Borrell at the Foreign Affairs Council stating that human rights are in the DNA of the European Union,
- having regard to the statement of 1 January 2019 by the Spokesperson of the European External Action Service (EEAS) on the case of Ahmed Mansoor,
- having regard to the UN Human Rights Experts statement of 12 June 2018 calling for the immediate release of jailed human rights defender Ahmed Mansoor, and of 7 May 2019 condemning his detention conditions,
- having regard to the Arab Charter on Human Rights,
- having regard to the Cooperation Arrangement of 2018 between the UAE and the EEAS;
- having regard to the most recent round of the EU-UAE human rights dialogue held on 9 June 2021 in a virtual format and the second meeting between senior officials of the UAE Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation and the EEAS held virtually on 3 March 2021,
- having regard to the UN Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment and the UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women, both of which the UAE is party to,
- having regard to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights of 1966,

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<sup>1</sup> OJ C 11, 13.1.2020, p. 21.

- having regard to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights of 1966,
  - having regard to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948,
  - having regard to the EU global human rights sanctions regime,
  - having regard to the EU guidelines on human rights defenders,
  - having regard to the EU guidelines on freedom of expression,
  - having regard to the EU guidelines on torture and other cruel treatment,
  - having regard to the fact that in 2015 Ahmed Mansoor was awarded the prestigious Martin Ennals Award for Human Rights Defenders,
  - having regard to the fact that Loujain al-Hathloul was awarded the 2020 Václav Havel Human Rights Award by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe,
  - having regard to Rule 144(5) and 132(4) of its Rules of Procedure,
- A. whereas on 29 May 2018, after a grossly unfair trial, Ahmed Mansoor was convicted and sentenced to 10 years in prison by the Court of Appeal in Abu Dhabi on charges related to his human rights advocacy; whereas on 31 December 2018 the ruling was upheld by the UAE’s Federal Supreme Court; whereas he was also fined one million UAE dirhams (EUR 232 475) and will be placed under surveillance for three years upon his release;
- B. whereas the UAE’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation stated on 29 March 2017 that ‘the Office of Public Prosecution for Electronic Crimes ordered the detention of Ahmed Mansoor on a charge of spreading false and misleading information over the internet, through agendas aimed at disseminating antipathy and sectarianism’; whereas other statements by the UAE authorities indicated that the sole reason for his detention was, in fact, the views he shared online; whereas the charges against him are based on alleged violations of the UAE’s 2012 Cybercrime Law; whereas according to both the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and Human Rights Watch, he was convicted solely for his human rights advocacy, including tweeting about injustices in his country, taking part in webinars on human rights and sending messages to human rights non-governmental organisations (NGOs);
- C. whereas since his arrest in March 2017, Ahmed Mansoor has remained in solitary confinement in Abu Dhabi’s al-Sadr prison, where he has been deprived of basic necessities and denied his rights as a detainee under Emirati law and international human rights law, including the UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners; whereas he has been prohibited from making any form of contact with other inmates and his family, apart from four 30-minute visits by his wife and limited phone calls to his mother and wife; whereas he went on hunger strike twice in 2019 in order to request that his basic rights as a prisoner be respected;
- D. whereas the UAE authorities have violated Ahmed Mansoor’s rights for more than 10 years with arbitrary arrest and detention, death threats, physical assault, government surveillance and inhumane treatment in custody;

- E. whereas the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders has stated that ‘the conditions and treatment that [Emirati human rights defenders Ahmed Mansoor, Mohammed al-Roken and Nasser Bin Ghaith] are subjected to, such as prolonged solitary confinement, are in violation of human rights standards and may constitute torture’;
- F. whereas a group of UN human rights experts has called on the UAE Government to release Mr Mansoor, describing his arrest as a direct attack on the legitimate work of human rights defenders in the UAE;
- G. whereas prior to his most recent arrest in 2017, Ahmed Mansoor called for universal and direct elections in the UAE and for the Federal National Council, a government advisory board, to be granted legislative powers; whereas he also administered an online forum called Al-Hiwar al-Emarati (the Emirati Dialogue) which criticised UAE policies;
- H. whereas there is systematic persecution of human rights defenders, journalists, lawyers and teachers speaking up on political and human rights issues in the UAE; whereas since 2011 in particular, the state has intensified its crackdown on freedom of association, assembly and expression; whereas human rights defenders and members of their families are subjected to forced disappearances, prolonged arbitrary detention, torture, judicial harassment and unfair trials, travel bans, physical and digital surveillance, and arbitrary dismissal from work;
- I. whereas the vague and overly broad definition of terrorism in Emirati law makes it possible to qualify a wide range of peaceful and legitimate activities as amounting to terrorism;
- J. whereas the UAE uses sophisticated spyware to target activists and other voices of dissent; whereas Ahmed Mansoor was targeted with spyware provided by the Israeli company NSO Group; whereas the Pegasus leak of July 2021 reported the use of the NSO spyware by the Emirati authorities against a range of targets, including human rights defenders both in the UAE and abroad; whereas Loujain al-Hathloul, a prominent Saudi women’s rights defender, was also subjected to cyberattacks by the UAE authorities, who hacked into her email before arresting and forcibly transferring her to Saudi Arabia;
- K. whereas women in the UAE continue to be subjected to a range of discriminatory laws and practices; whereas violations of women’s rights include the kidnapping and hostage-taking of Saudi and Emirati women and women’s rights activists, a lack of investigation and accountability in alleged crimes against women, including for example the sexual assault of British national Caitlin McNamara, where the accused perpetrator was not investigated or held accountable, systemic discrimination against women, the exploitation of women migrant workers, sex trafficking and sexual slavery;
- L. whereas the *kafala* (sponsorship) system is still being implemented in the UAE as an integral part of its social and legal order; whereas according to reports by international human rights organisations, the UAE’s inhumane practices against foreign workers, who constitute 80 % of the country’s population, are pervasive, and such violations increased during the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic; whereas in preparation for the upcoming international fair, Expo 2020 Dubai, to be hosted from October 2021 until March 2022, businesses and construction companies are coercing workers into signing untranslated documents, confiscating their passports, exposing them to extreme working hours in unsafe weather conditions and providing them with unsanitary housing;

- M. whereas the UAE and the EU have signed a reciprocal bilateral short-stay visa waiver agreement exempting UAE citizens from requiring Schengen visas;
- N. whereas the EU is the main donor to Interpol's inter-judicial cooperation programmes; whereas the Inspector General of the UAE's Ministry of Interior, Major General Ahmed Nasser al-Raisi, is a candidate for the Interpol presidency;
- O. whereas the UAE has not ratified several core UN human rights treaties, notably the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and its optional protocols abolishing the death penalty and against torture, and the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearances;
- P. whereas the EU considers the UAE a partner, including in areas of political and economic relations; whereas the EU and the UAE have held human rights dialogues since 2013 with biannual meetings, and whereas the 10th EU-UAE human rights dialogue held on 9 June 2021 provided an opportunity to discuss issues of concern with the UAE authorities;
1. Strongly condemns, once again, the detention of Ahmed Mansoor and all other human rights defenders in the UAE, who have been imprisoned solely for exercising their basic human rights, including their rights to freedom of speech, association, peaceful assembly and expression both online and offline, which are enshrined not only in universal human rights instruments, but also in the Arab Charter on Human Rights; deeply deplores the gap between the UAE's claims to be a tolerant and rights-respecting country and the fact its own human rights defenders are detained in harsh conditions;
  2. Reiterates its call for the immediate and unconditional release of Ahmed Mansoor, Mohammed al-Roken and Nasser bin Ghaith, as well as all other human rights defenders, political activists and peaceful dissidents;
  3. Urges the UAE authorities, pending their release, to ensure that Ahmed Mansoor and all other prisoners are treated in line with the UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners; urges, in particular, that Mansoor be removed from solitary confinement, and that all prisoners be allowed regular lawyer and family visits and be provided with adequate medical care, that UN experts and international NGOs be allowed to visit Mansoor and others in prison and monitor detention conditions, and that all torture allegations be thoroughly investigated;
  4. Expresses its grave concern at the continued reports, including through leaked letters published in July 2021, that Ahmed Mansoor still remains in dire conditions in solitary confinement; reminds the UAE authorities that prolonged and indefinite solitary confinement amounts to torture; calls on the UAE authorities to guarantee all detainees, including prisoners of conscience, due process and fair trial; urges the authorities to amend the Anti-Terrorism Law, the Cybercrime Law and Federal Law No 2 of 2008, which are repeatedly used to prosecute human rights defenders, in order to comply with international human rights standards;
  5. Calls on the UAE authorities to stop the harassment of and immediately lift the travel ban against human rights defenders; insists that the authorities guarantee that human rights defenders in the UAE are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities in all

circumstances, both inside and outside the country, without fear of reprisal and free of all restrictions, including judicial harassment;

6. Calls on the VP/HR to closely follow the case of Ahmed Mansoor to secure his immediate release and that of other human rights defenders; calls, in particular, on the VP/HR to request prison visits to the human rights defenders during his upcoming visit to the UAE and to publicly and privately call for their immediate and unconditional release during meetings with the UAE authorities; calls on the EEAS to report back to Parliament on the actions undertaken so far by the EU Delegation and Member States in Abu Dhabi aimed at providing Mr Mansoor with appropriate support;
7. Urges all Member States, given the UAE's internal repression, in line with Regulation (EU) 2021/821 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 May 2021 setting up a Union regime for the control of exports, brokering, technical assistance, transit and transfer of dual-use items<sup>1</sup>, to suspend the sale and export of surveillance technology to the UAE and their maintenance and updating if no concrete and measurable steps are taken to address such abuses;
8. Calls on the EEAS to propose the adoption of EU targeted measures against those responsible for grave human rights violations in the UAE, including the persecution of Ahmed Mansoor and other human rights defenders, under the EU global human rights sanctions regime; reiterates that all sanctioning procedures must be evidence-based and initiated only when concrete human rights violations can be determined;
9. Calls for the EU to adopt and make public meaningful human rights benchmarks and a list of individual cases for its human rights dialogue with the UAE, with a view to enabling a genuine and results-oriented discussion on human rights;
10. Calls for the EU to include a discussion on human rights, particularly the situation of human rights defenders, as a permanent item on the agenda of the annual summit between the EU and the Gulf Cooperation Council;
11. Expresses concern at the reported use by the UAE authorities of the NSO Group's spyware for the unlawful targeting of the mobile phones of hundreds of individuals in the United Kingdom, including lawyers, academics and a parliamentarian; calls on the VP/HR to request clarification on these reports from the UAE authorities, including with regard to the possible targeting of EU nationals or individuals on EU territory, and to report back to Parliament;
12. Recalls that in 2015 the EU signed a short-stay visa waiver agreement with the UAE; calls on the Commission to report to Parliament on the compliance of this agreement with the relevant EU legislation, notably as regards the consideration of human rights and fundamental freedoms as a criteria for visa exemption; calls on the Commission and the Council to report to Parliament on progress in this area;
13. Calls on the members of Interpol's General Assembly, and in particular the EU Member States, to duly examine the allegations of human rights abuses concerning General Major Nasser Ahmed al-Raisi ahead of the election of the presidency of the organisation from 23

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<sup>1</sup> OJ L 206, 11.6.2021, p. 1.

to 25 November 2021; notes the concerns expressed by civil society regarding his candidacy and the potential impact on the reputation of the institution;

14. In order to signal their disapproval of the human rights violations in the UAE, invites the international companies sponsoring Expo 2020 Dubai to withdraw their sponsorship and encourages Member States not to participate in the event;
15. Deeply deplores the role of the UAE authorities in the extradition of the women's rights activist Loujain al-Hathloul to Saudi Arabia, where she has been imprisoned, tortured and persecuted for the advocacy of women's rights;
16. Expresses its concern about the situation of women in the UAE, despite some progress, and calls on the authorities to reform the Personal Status Law to provide women with equal rights and to ensure that Emirati women can pass nationality to their children on an equal basis to men;
17. Welcomes the UAE's moratorium on executions since 2017; calls on the UAE to ratify the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and its protocol aiming at the abolition of the death penalty;
18. Supports the continued and strengthened dialogue between the EU, its Member States, and the UAE on issues of mutual interest, as provided for in the Cooperation Arrangement; considers that regular interparliamentary meetings between Parliament and its partners in the Gulf region are an important forum for developing a constructive and frank dialogue on all issues of concern, including human rights, security and trade;
19. Calls for the establishment of more stringent transparency rules regarding the lobbying activities of foreign organisations towards EU institutions;
20. Calls for the translation of this resolution into Arabic;
21. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Government and Parliament of the United Arab Emirates, the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, the Commission, the EU Special Representative for Human Rights, the governments and parliaments of the Member States, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the governments of the members of the Gulf Cooperation Council.