

# URGENT ACTION

## PRISON SENTENCE AND FINE UPHELD FOR JOURNALIST

The Federal Supreme Court in Abu Dhabi, in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), upheld the conviction and sentence of Tayseer Salman al-Najjar on 19 June. The Jordanian poet and journalist was arrested on 13 December 2015 and is serving a three-year prison sentence for comments he posted on Facebook that were “damaging [to] the reputation and prestige of the Emirati state”. He is a prisoner of conscience.

On 19 June, the Federal Supreme Court upheld the conviction and sentence of poet and journalist **Tayseer Salman al-Najjar**. He was initially sentenced on 15 March by the Criminal Chamber of the Appeal Court in Abu Dhabi to three years in prison and a fine of 500,000 Dirham (about US\$ 136,130). Tayseer Salman al-Najjar was convicted of “publishing information with the aim of damaging the reputation and prestige of the Emirati state”, in connection with a comment he posted on his Facebook account in 2014. In this comment, he praised Palestinian “resistance” in Gaza and criticized countries including the UAE. Tayseer Salman al-Najjar denies “insulting” the UAE. He is held in al-Wathba prison in Abu Dhabi.

Tayseer al-Najjar, 45, was initially arrested at the Security Department in Abu Dhabi on 13 December 2015, after he was summoned earlier that day. On 3 December 2015, on his way to Jordan to visit his family, Tayseer al-Najjar was informed by the authorities at Abu Dhabi airport that he was banned from leaving the UAE. On 18 February 2016, after 68 days spent in incommunicado detention, he called his family and told them that he was being held at a State Security facility in solitary confinement and put under “heavy pressure” to confess. Amnesty International believes that he was tortured. About 10 days later, he made another call to his wife stating that he had been transferred to al-Wathba prison. Tayseer al-Najjar had no access to a lawyer before his trial began on 18 January when he appeared before the Federal Appeal Court, for the first time since his arrest, to be officially charged. The hearing was adjourned to 1 February so that he could be represented by a lawyer. This was followed by another trial session on 15 February when the court scheduled his verdict for 15 March.

### Please write immediately in Arabic, English or your own language:

- Urging the UAE authorities to quash Tayseer Salman al-Najjar’s conviction and to immediately and unconditionally release him, as he is a prisoner of conscience imprisoned solely for peacefully exercising his right to freedom of expression;
- Calling on them to order an independent and effective investigation into his allegations of torture and other ill-treatment;
- Urging them to ensure that, pending his release, he is protected from torture and other ill-treatment, and given any necessary medical treatment he may require.

### PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 2 AUGUST 2017 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: +971 4 330 4044  
 Email: info@primeminister.ae  
 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  
 POB: 398, Abu Dhabi  
 United Arab Emirates  
 Fax: +971 2 402 2762/ +971 2 441 5780  
 Email: moi@moi.gov.ae  
**Salutation: Your Highness**

### And copies to:

Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi  
 HH Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al  
 Nahyan  
 Crown Prince Court King Abdullah Bin  
 Abdulaziz Al Saud Street  
 PO Box: 124  
 Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates  
 Fax: +971 2 668 6622  
 Twitter: @MBZNews

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. HIS EXCELLENCY MR SULAIMAN HAMID ALMAZROUI, Embassy of the United Arab Emirates, 30 Prince’s Gate, London SW7 1PT, 020 7581 1281, email [pressuk@mofa.gov.ae](mailto:pressuk@mofa.gov.ae)  
**Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.** This is the second update of UA 112/16. Further information: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde25/5681/2017/en/>

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### ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Tayseer Salman al-Najjar is a married Jordanian father of five young children who lives in the UAE. He moved from Jordan to the UAE in April 2015 to join Al Jewa, a large publishing house in the UAE, ahead of the January 2016 launch of al-Dar, a weekly newspaper for which he wrote the cultural pages.

In July 2014, during the Gaza conflict, Tayseer al-Najjar posted on his Facebook page: "Message to some journalists and writers who do not like the Gazan resistance ... There is no two rights in one case, but the right one is the Gazan resistance and all else is bad, such as Israel, the UAE, Sissi [the President of Egypt] and other regimes that are no longer ashamed of shame itself."

On 3 December 2015, when Tayseer al-Najjar learnt that he was banned from leaving the UAE at Abu Dhabi Airport, the authorities told him that he was to report daily to the security authorities. On 13 December 2015, he received a phone call in the morning summoning him to the Security Department. He was arrested shortly after he spoke to his wife on the phone at 7pm, just before entering the building. Tayseer al-Najjar's family was unaware of his whereabouts and the reason for his arrest until he was allowed to call them on 18 February 2016.

Since 2011, the UAE authorities have mounted an extensive crackdown on freedom of expression and association in the country. The space for dissent has shrunk severely and many people, both Emiratis and non-Emiratis, who have criticized the UAE authorities, their policies, or the human rights situation in the country have been harassed, arrested, tortured, or subjected to unfair trial and imprisonment. The authorities have arrested, detained, and prosecuted more than 100 activists, human rights defenders and other critics of the government, including prominent lawyers, judges and academics, on broad and sweeping national security-related or cybercrime charges and in proceedings that have failed to meet international fair trial standards. Some individuals previously subjected to enforced disappearance have said they were tortured or otherwise ill-treated and were forced to make "confessions" during interrogations without the presence of a lawyer. The State Security Chamber of the Federal Supreme Court often allows the use of such "confessions," in contravention of international human rights law, and convicts defendants even when they have repudiated them.

On 29 November 2016, Federal Law No.11/ 2016 entered into force. This law concerns the Federal Judicial Authority, which introduced a previously non-existent appeals procedure for cases relating to state security. Trials held before the State Security Chamber of the Federal Supreme Court fail to meet international fair trial standards: as in this case, suspects are typically held for prolonged periods in incommunicado detention during which they have been ill-treated or tortured. On 20 December 2016, Amnesty International wrote to the UAE's Minister of Justice welcoming the new law but expressing concern that unless it is accompanied by amendments to the Code of Criminal procedure bringing arrest, detention and trial procedures in line with international standards, then the introduction of the appeal process will not address the problem of unfair trial in respect of such cases.

Further information on UA: 112/16 Index: MDE 25/6553/2017 Issue Date: 21 June 2017