



Councillor Bev Craig  
Leader of Manchester City Council  
Town Hall  
Manchester  
M60 2LA.

13 November, 2023

**SUBJECT: Emirati dissident Ahmed Mansoor and COP28**

Dear Ms Craig,

We are writing to you, as human rights organisations working on the Gulf region, to ask that Manchester City Council use the opportunity of the COP28 climate summit in Dubai to publicly call on Manchester City Council's partners in the government of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) to release the award-winning rights activist Ahmed Mansoor from prison.

The UAE will host the 28th Conference of Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, known as "COP28", starting on 30 November 2023. The attention that the event will attract presents an opportunity for progressive voices to draw attention not only to the climate crisis, but also to the imprisonment of activists such as Mansoor, a recipient of the prestigious Martin Ennals Award for Human Rights Defenders who has been arbitrarily imprisoned in isolation since security forces raided his home just before midnight on 20 March 2017. Prior to his arrest he faced repeated intimidation, harassment, and death threats from the UAE authorities and their supporters, including a sophisticated spyware attack by the Emirati government. Mansoor was the last Emirati human rights defender still working openly in the UAE.

Manchester City Council has a deep and long-standing relationship with entities controlled by individuals operating in leadership roles within the highest echelons of the UAE government, which places upon it a special responsibility to show support and solidarity with victims of repression by that government.

In June this year, Manchester City Council sought to distance itself from those links to the UAE government, claiming to media that the Abu Dhabi United Group - the UAE private equity group behind both its joint venture with the council and the ownership of Manchester City Football Club - is "a private entity not synonymous with the Abu Dhabi state." You repeated that claim to BBC North West journalist Annabel Tiffin in a broadcast the following day. The well-documented reality is that Manchester Life Development Company (MLDC) is a joint property venture between Manchester City Council and an

entity that, [according to its website](#), “is wholly owned by His Highness Sheikh Mansour bin Zayed Al Nahyan and ... registered in Abu Dhabi.” Sheikh Mansour is the Deputy Prime Minister of the UAE and the Minister of Presidential Affairs. You and Joanne Roney, the CEO of Manchester City Council, are both directors of MLDC, alongside Simon Pearce, a Special Advisor to the Chairman of the Abu Dhabi Executive Affairs Authority, Khaldoon Al Mubarak. The Abu Dhabi Executive Affairs Authority is “a specialized government agency mandated to provide strategic policy advice to His Highness Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, President of the United Arab Emirates.”

This is not the first time human rights groups have written to Manchester City Council asking it to use its links to the UAE government positively. In 2016, Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International wrote to your predecessor Sir Richard Leese and then City Chief Executive Sir Howard Bernstein, asking them to take “simple and principled steps” to publicly support victims of torture and other human rights abuses in the UAE. They declined the opportunity, with Sir Richard Leese stating simply that the UAE owners of Manchester City were “exemplary business partners.” He has subsequently defended the UAE’s human rights record.

It speaks to the closeness of Manchester’s political leaders with the government of the UAE leadership that Richard Leese and Howard Bernstein have both since been appointed Honorary Presidents of Manchester City FC and Bernstein has since 2017 been a strategic development advisor for City Football Group, which owns Manchester City and is majority owned by Sheikh Mansour bin Zayed Al Nahyan. In June this year, Andy Burnham, the Mayor of Greater Manchester, was asked about “[torture, detention, and the criminalisation of gay people](#)” in the UAE and he responded that he based his judgment on these matters on “how they run Manchester City and what they do to improve life here [in Manchester]”, praised their contribution to Manchester and said that these human rights issues were for the UK government to raise.

It was welcome that you told the BBC in June that “as a city we don’t shy away from [human rights]” and that if you were asked about human rights of any country, you would “give a clear answer”. In light of these commitments, we ask that you use your influence and make a public call on the UAE to release Ahmed Mansoor and others in the UAE who have been unfairly imprisoned for expressing criticism of its government.

We would of course be happy to discuss these issues in further detail with you or your team. Please let me know if we can supply any further information on Ahmed Mansoor’s case or on the cases of any other political prisoners in the UAE.

Yours Sincerely,

ALQST for Human Rights  
Bahrain Institute for Democracy and Human Rights  
Emirates Detainees Advocacy Center  
FairSquare  
Gulf Centre for Human Rights