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# Amnesty International

## MONTHLY ACTION

COMMUNITY ORGANISING UNIT, Amnesty International UK  
HRAC, 17-25 New Inn Yard, London EC2A 3EA



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May 2015

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### SILENCING DISSENT IN THE GULF STATES

In recent months the clampdown by authorities on peaceful dissenting voices has intensified across many Gulf countries. AIUK is working on two cases, Mahdi Abu Dheeb, a jailed teachers' union leader in Bahrain, and Dr Mohammed Al Roken, a prominent human rights lawyer, jailed in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). We are also continuing to insist on freedom for Raif Badawi in Saudi Arabia, though his case is not part of this monthly action.

#### MAHDI ABU DHEEB - BAHRAIN

Mahdi Abu Dheeb is the President of the Bahrain Teachers Association. In February 2011 he called a strike of his members as part of the spring uprising in Bahrain. He was calling for peaceful reforms and quality education for all. On 6 April 2011 he was abducted by security forces, held incommunicado and tortured. Following a military tribunal and a civilian appeal, he was sentenced to five years in prison, where he is being denied medical care and his health is deteriorating. Amnesty International considers Mahdi Abu Dheeb to be a prisoner of conscience, jailed solely for exercising his rights to freedom of expression and association and we demand his immediate and unconditional release, and that allegations of torture are investigated and those responsible are brought to justice.

#### WHAT YOU NEED YOU TO DO: SOLIDARITY MESSAGES FOR MAHDI

We know that solidarity messages have made a real difference in terms of keeping the hopes up of Mahdi and his family. Choose a postcard of your location (or take a photo) and post it to Mahdi Abu Dheeb's home address:

House #2430  
Road #4053  
Block #740  
Al-'Aali  
Kingdom of Bahrain

**Sample wording:** Greetings from (location). We stand in solidarity with you Mahdi Abu Dheeb. We have called on the government to release you immediately and unconditionally and will continue to do so until you are free.

## DR MOHAMMED AL ROKEN – UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

Dr Mohammed, a well-known and respected human rights lawyer, is serving his second year of a ten-year jail sentence – simply for doing his job and defending human rights. Dr Mohammed has now spent over 1000 days in prison. Prior to his imprisonment, Dr Mohammed had defended countless activists and political prisoners over the years – including the UAE Five, a group of prisoners of conscience whose case made headlines around the world back in 2011.

Now Dr Mohammed is himself imprisoned on spurious grounds. He is a prisoner of conscience, jailed simply for speaking out in defence of human rights, by a regime that chooses to silence and imprison those, like Mohammed, who criticise the lack of room for free speech. Dr Mohammed has faced a targeted campaign by the government because of his work as a human rights lawyer. Over the years, he has been arrested and detained numerous times, been banned from travelling, from giving public lectures, from writing in newspapers and giving media interviews. Dr Mohammed took on the human rights cases that no one else would touch. He's been a member of Amnesty for years, and often informed our work in the country. Now it's our turn to speak up for Dr Mohammed.

### WHAT YOU NEED YOU TO DO: PETITION TO CALL FOR FREEDOM FOR DR AL ROKEN

Please make copies of the attached petition file and organise signature collections at your group meetings, in your community and amongst supporters. Please ensure all signed petition forms are returned by **22 June**. Please send to IAR Team, Amnesty UK, 17-25 New Inn Yard, London, EC2A 3EA.

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#### CONTENTS

- This guidance sheet
- Dr Al Roken petition form

#### GOT QUERIES OR WANT TO DO MORE?

For queries on this action and for updates please contact:  
Shane.enright@amnesty.org.uk / 0207 033 1569

Local group's monthly mailing can be downloaded from:  
[www.amnesty.org.uk/groups](http://www.amnesty.org.uk/groups)

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# MONTHLY ACTION

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## Background Information

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### MAHDI ABU DHEEB - BAHRAIN

April 2011 was a time of unrest in Bahrain. The mood of political uprising sparked by the so-called Arab Spring had spread across the region. From January until March 2011, people took to the streets, many calling for the ruling regime to step down. They were often met with violence from the police officiating the protests. In April 2011, as both the protests and the violent crackdowns continued in the streets of Bahrain, Mahdi Abu Dheeb, a school teacher and then president of the Bahrain Teachers' Association, called on his teaching union to strike. Supported by his colleague Jalila al-Salman, the pair wanted to demonstrate solidarity with those calling for governmental reform. It wasn't long before Mahdi and Jalila were arrested.

Mahdi was at his uncle's house on 6 April 2011 when police seized him for interrogation. They took him to a secret location: his family didn't know where he was for over three weeks. Mahdi was then subjected to 64 days in solitary confinement. According to the UN, subjecting to more than 15 consecutive days in isolation amounts to torture. When he was interrogated, Mahdi says the police beat him. Mahdi's daughter, Maryam, told us that her father had two broken ribs and was suffering from severe neck and back pain when she saw him after his time in detention.

After Mahdi and Jalila had called for their union to strike, they were arrested by Bahraini police on charges including: Inciting hatred of the regime; Possessing pamphlets; and Disseminating fabricated stories and information. We have never seen any evidence of these charges being true. There is no evidence that Mahdi or Jalila ever called for violent protests, or used violent tactics. Mahdi and Jalila were tried before a military court in September 2011. They were found guilty, and Mahdi sentenced to 10 years in prison – which was reduced to five years after an appeal. Mahdi has already served 80% of his reduced sentence, and is being denied the parole routinely offered to prisoners at this point in their incarceration. Jalila was dealt a three year sentence, later reduced to six months. She was released in November 2012. In June 2015, Mahdi and Jalila are due to receive the prestigious Arthur Svensson Award for Trade Union Rights

We are calling on Bahrain to release Mahdi immediately and unconditionally. In addition, we are also calling for medical treatment for Mahdi. Mahdi sustained serious injuries while in detention, including broken ribs. His daughter says that the prison authorities have played 'a cat and mouse game' in allowing him treatment he urgently needs. We also want to see a full investigation into Mahdi's claims that he was tortured in police custody. We want authorities in Bahrain to investigate Mahdi's allegations of torture and ill-treatment, and bring those responsible to justice.

Find out more: [www.amnesty.org.uk/mahdi](http://www.amnesty.org.uk/mahdi)

Bahrain: Behind the Rhetoric [www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde11/1396/2015/en/](http://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde11/1396/2015/en/)

## **DR MOHAMMED AL ROKEN – UNITED ARAB EMIRATES**

Dr Mohammed was arrested in July 2012 as he was driving to a police station to enquire about his son and son-in-law, who had both been arrested earlier that day. State security officers went to Dr Mohammed's house and took books and laptops along with family photographs. They took Dr Mohammed to a secret location and kept him in solitary confinement for three months. His family did not know what had happened to him until he resurfaced in detention months later, awaiting trial for charges of 'attempting to overthrow the government.'

In July 2013, Dr Mohammed appeared before the Supreme Court in Abu Dhabi on charges of 'attempting to overthrow the government'. He was one of 94 defendants at the mass trial – lawyers and judges, teachers and students, all of them calling for democratic reform in the UAE. Collectively, they are now known as the 'UAE 94'. The trial was conducted behind closed doors: international media representatives and independent spectators – including our trial observer – were banned from watching proceedings. The trial was a sham. Defendants hadn't been allowed to see a lawyer, all of them had been held in secret locations. Many of the defendants told the judge that they had been tortured in detention; others claimed their signatures had been forced on so-called confession papers. The claims of torture and forgery were waved aside and used as evidence regardless; each defendant was dealt a sentence of between seven and 15 years. Dr Mohammed was sentenced to a decade in prison.

On the same day in 2012 that Dr Mohammed was arrested, a spokesperson for the UN's Human Rights Office expressed concern about the UAE's 'crackdown on human rights defenders through harassments, denial of travel, termination of work contracts, arrests, denaturalization and expulsion from the country' and urged the UAE government to release those detained for the peaceful exercise of their human rights and provide them with the protection to ensure they carry out their work.

12 April 2015 marked a thousand days since the UAE jailed Dr Mohammed for speaking up for human rights and criticising the increasingly repressive regime there. Dr Mohammed Al Roken's case was a major focus at our recent Amnesty AGM and National Conference. The conference was held at Warwick University, where Dr Mohammed himself had studied.

**Find out more:** [www.amnesty.org.uk/uae](http://www.amnesty.org.uk/uae)

**There is no freedom here: Silencing Dissent in the UAE**

[www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde25/0018/2014/en/](http://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde25/0018/2014/en/)