



Refugee Documentation Centre (Ireland)
LEGAL AID BOARD

United Arab Emirates - Researched and compiled by the Refugee Documentation Centre of Ireland on Thursday 3 March 2016

Information on human rights

A document published in February 2016 by *Human Rights Watch* points out that:

“UAE authorities have curtailed the access of international rights groups to the country and imprisoned people who have provided information to nongovernmental organizations, making it difficult to determine the full extent to which the UAE is engaging in enforced disappearances and incommunicado detentions” (Human Rights Watch (4 February 2016) *UAE: Libyans Facing Unfair Trial*).

A report issued in January 2016 by *Open Doors International* states:

“The United Arab Emirates is one of the most strategically important and relatively stable countries in a very volatile region. Having a population of less than ten million (of which expatriates make-up around eighty per cent), UAE is one of the free and stable economies in the region and a hub for international financial and construction companies. All decisions about political leadership rest with the dynastic rulers of the seven emirates and there is no place for the will of the people at large. Freedom of religion, press, assembly, association and expression are severely restricted in the kingdom. There is no space or recognition of political parties, according to Freedom House which rated the country as “not free” “ (Open Doors International (13 January 2016) *World Watch List 2016: Persecution Dynamics – United Arab Emirates*).

In February 2016 *Amnesty International* states, commenting on events of 2015, that:

“The authorities arbitrarily restricted freedom of expression, arresting and prosecuting government critics. A new law on combating discrimination and hatred imposed further limits on the rights to freedom of expression and association. Security forces subjected dozens of people to enforced disappearance. Torture and other ill-treatment of detainees was common. Prisoners of conscience remained imprisoned following unfair trials. Women faced discrimination in law and in practice. Migrant workers were inadequately protected by law and faced exploitation and abuse. The death penalty remained in force and there was one execution” (Amnesty International (24 February 2016) *Amnesty International Report 2015/16: United Arab Emirates*).

A publication released in January 2016 by *Human Rights Watch* reviewing events of the preceding year states:

“The United Arab Emirates (UAE) continued in 2015 to arbitrarily detain and in some cases forcibly disappear individuals who criticized the authorities, and its security forces continued to face allegations that they torture detainees in pretrial detention. The UAE passed an anti-discrimination law that further jeopardizes free speech and is discriminatory in that it excludes references to gender and sexuality. Authorities denied access to the country to activists who criticized the UAE’s mistreatment of migrant workers” (Human Rights Watch (27 January 2016) *World Report 2016: United Arab Emirates*).

Bertelsmann Stiftung issued a report in 2016 noting:

“At the outset of 2015, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) is a stable country with all the attributes of a modern economy and many positives in state-building and political management” (*Bertelsmann Stiftung* (2016) *BTI 2016 | United Arab Emirates Country Report*, p.2).

This document also states:

“The UAE state has a monopoly on the use of force. The security forces have complete and total control over the entire territory of the country, and there are no areas in which any organizations or opposition groups infringe on that control” (*ibid*, p.5).

This report also notes:

“The UAE does not conduct elections at the executive level, and, as such, citizens do not have the right to change their government. Instead, each of the seven individual emirates is ruled by a hereditary family with the leader chosen from among the tribe’s family members” (*ibid*, p.7).

The *United States Department of State* published a report in June 2015 commenting on events of 2014, noting:

“The United Arab Emirates (UAE) is a federation of seven semiautonomous emirates with a resident population of approximately 9.3 million, of whom an estimated 11.5 percent are citizens. The rulers of the seven emirates constitute the Federal Supreme Council, the country’s highest legislative and executive body. The council selects a president and a vice president from its membership, and the president appoints the prime minister and cabinet. In 2009 the council selected Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed al-Nahyan, ruler of Abu Dhabi emirate, to a second five-year term as president. The emirates are under patriarchal rule with political allegiance defined by loyalty to tribal leaders, leaders of the individual emirates, and leaders of the federation. There are limited democratically elected institutions but no political parties. A limited appointed electorate participates in periodic elections for the Federal National Council (FNC), a consultative body that can examine, review, and recommend changes to legislation, consisting of 40 representatives allocated proportionally to each emirate based on population. In 2011 the appointed electorate of approximately 129,000 citizens elected 20 FNC members, and the rulers of the individual emirates appointed the other 20. Citizens can express their concerns directly to their leaders through traditional consultative mechanisms such as the open majlis (forum). Topics of legislation can also emerge through discussions and debates in the FNC. Authorities maintained effective control over the security forces. The three most significant human rights problems were citizens’ inability to change their government; limitations on citizens’ civil liberties (including the freedoms of speech, press, assembly, association, and internet use); and arbitrary arrests, incommunicado detentions, and lengthy pretrial detentions. Other reported human rights problems included police and prison guard brutality. The government continued to interfere with citizens’ privacy rights, including increased arrests and detentions following individuals’ internet postings or commentary. There were limited reports of corruption, and the government lacked transparency and judicial independence. Domestic abuse and violence against women remained problems. Noncitizens faced legal and societal discrimination. Legal and societal discrimination against persons with HIV/AIDS and based on sexual orientation and gender identity remained

problems. Trafficking in persons, mistreatment and sexual abuse of foreign domestic servants and other migrant workers, and discrimination against persons with disabilities remained problems, although the government took steps to prevent them. The government restricted worker rights. During the year the government reported it took steps to investigate allegations of mistreatment and abuse made by detainees” (United States Department of State (24 June 2015) *2014 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: United Arab Emirates*).

References

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This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Refugee Documentation Centre within time constraints. This response is not and does not purport to be conclusive as to the merit of any

particular claim to refugee status or asylum. Please read in full all documents referred to.

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