

***"Don't whitewash the UAE's gross human rights abuses": NGOs call on World Tolerance Summit speakers to cancel their participation***

Dear participants of the World Tolerance Summit,

We, the undersigned, call on all participants and speakers at the [World Tolerance Summit](#) taking place in Dubai on November 13 and 14 to withdraw from the event, which promotes a misleading image of the United Arab Emirates as a model of tolerance and openness. This is the second World Tolerance Summit, initiated in 2018 to "strengthen the UAE's position as a model of co-existence and cultural tolerance around the world."

Since the Arab Spring in 2011, the Emirati government has increased its brutal [clampdown](#) on fundamental human rights and freedoms. The authorities have [prosecuted](#) and imprisoned political opponents, human rights defenders, journalists and critics, and systematically silenced peaceful dissenting voices, to such an extent that, today, freedom of speech and civic space are virtually nonexistent in the country. In a recent [statement](#), seven United Nations independent experts expressed grave concern over the situation of imprisoned human rights defender Ahmed Mansoor, who is currently serving a 10-year prison sentence for "insulting the 'status and prestige of the UAE and its symbols' including its leaders" in reprisal for his peaceful activism. Over 140 NGOs worldwide [appealed](#) this past month to the UAE to free Ahmed Mansoor, who spent his 50th birthday suffering in an isolation cell in Al-Sadr prison.

We also wish to inform you that in October 2018, the European Parliament adopted a [resolution](#), calling on the UAE to, among other things, stop all forms of harassment and immediately lift the travel ban against human rights defenders, and urging the authorities to "guarantee in all circumstances that human rights defenders in the UAE are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities, both inside and outside the country, without fear of reprisals".

While hundreds have been victims of arbitrary arrests, enforced disappearance, torture, and unfair trials within the UAE, the authorities are also responsible for gross violations of international human rights and humanitarian law outside its territory. Since the outbreak of hostilities in 2015, the UAE has been one of the main warring parties in Yemen. Attacks by the Saudi-UAE led coalition are responsible for over [8,000](#) civilian deaths through direct targeting alone.

The Group of International and Regional Eminent Experts on Yemen recently [expressed](#) their concern over the active role of the UAE in this conflict and indiscriminate attacks by the UAE and other parties to the conflict against hospitals, water facilities, markets and other civilian spaces. They strongly condemned all parties to the conflict for blocking access to humanitarian aid and the use of starvation as a weapon of war, which amount to war crimes. Save the Children estimated that [85,000](#) children under the age of five have starved to death as a result of the conflict so far. The Group of UN experts also condemned the systematic use of enforced disappearance, [torture](#) and extrajudicial executions by parties to the conflict.

Regrettably, the UAE Government devotes more effort to concealing its human rights abuses than to addressing them and invests heavily in the funding and sponsorship of institutions, events and initiatives that are aimed at projecting a favourable image to the outside world. The Tolerance Summit is yet another tool in the UAE's campaign to "whitewash" its human rights record.

In light of the above, we urge you to reconsider your participation in the Summit. By promoting the UAE as "the global capital for tolerance" while hundreds are imprisoned for having peacefully expressed their opinion, you will contribute to silencing their voices.

**Signatories:**

International Campaign for Freedom in the UAE

Association for Victims of Torture in the UAE

Gulf Centre for Human Rights

PEN International

Michael Mansfield QC, barrister

Campaign Against Arms Trade

Detained International

FreeLatifa Campaign

Nael Georges, author

Fadi Al-Qadi, MENA Human Rights Expert and author

International Commission of Jurists

Alkarama

Jonathan Emmett, author

Laurence Anholt, author

International Centre for Justice and Human Rights

Front Line Defenders

MENA Rights Group

Matthew Hedges, PhD candidate, Middle East security

Dr David Wearing, Royal Holloway, University of London

Brian Dooley, author and human rights advocate

Julia Legner, MENA human rights expert