

HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH

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June 5, 2017

H.R.H. Sheikh Mohammed bin Zaid
Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi
Deputy Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces
Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates

Subject: UAE Role in Detentions in Aden and Hadramawt

Your Highness,

We write to inquire regarding the role of the United Arab Emirates in violations of the laws of war in Yemen, particularly in regards arbitrary and abusive detentions.

During our discussions with Yemeni officials in Aden this February, we raised the issues of arbitrary detention, enforced disappearance, and mistreatment of detainees. Human Rights Watch also requested permission to visit detention facilities in southern Yemen. We would be grateful if your government could facilitate such permissions for Human Rights Watch to any detention facilities under UAE control, including ones located in Aden and Hadramawt.

Since January 2017, Human Rights Watch has documented dozens of cases of individuals being arbitrarily detained or forcibly disappeared, many of whom appear to remain detained or unaccounted for, in Aden, Hadramawt, Lahj and Abyan. We have documented allegations of mistreatment, including of children. Those detained are held in official and non-official detention facilities, including but not limited to:

- In Aden: the Central Prison, the Criminal Investigation Department, Camp Tariq, Bir Ahmed, and a detention facility in the Tawahi neighborhood;
- In Hadramawt: al-Riyan Airport and the Presidential Palace.

Human Rights Watch documented arbitrary or abusive arrests by multiple security forces, but most appeared to have been carried out by the forces known as the “Security Belt” in Aden and “al-Nukhba” in Hadramawt. The Security Administration in Aden was also implicated in abuses. Multiple sources told Human Rights Watch the UAE provides these forces support and direction.

We seek further information on the above concerns, and kindly request a response by June 15 so that we may reflect the UAE's position in our upcoming reporting on these issues:

1. Could the UAE provide an update on which locations it is currently using as detention facilities in Yemen and who is in charge of each of these facilities and to whom these individuals are accountable? How many detainees are being held in each location, how many of these detainees have had charges brought against them, and what is the legal basis for detaining these individuals?
2. Have any investigations been undertaken into allegations of cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or torture of detainees by officials? Please describe. Have any of those investigations led to prosecutions or other punitive measures? What additional steps are authorities taking to protect detainees from ill-treatment?
3. What is the nature of UAE support to security forces in Yemen carrying out detentions, including the Security Belt, al-Nukhba, and the Security Administration in Aden? Please provide information on the types of support provided, the particular forces and units supported, and when this support started and if it is ongoing.
4. Multiple government officials and families of detainees described the Security Belt and al-Nukhba as UAE-directed, and other forces, including the Security Administration, as UAE-supported. Please provide information on the command structure of these and other security forces the UAE supports, including the role of UAE officers in developing target lists for arrests, conducting raids, carrying out interrogations, and deciding when and if individuals who are detained should be transferred or may be released.
5. Has Yemen transferred any individuals into the UAE's custody inside or outside Yemen? Has the UAE transferred any detainees it is holding outside of Yemen, for example to Eritrea or to other states? If it did, were these detainees able to contest the transfer in Yemen. If the UAE transferred detainees to another state's custody, what steps did the UAE take to determine that those transferred would not be subjected to torture or other ill-treatment?

As we have done in the past, we will endeavor to include the Ministry's full response in English and Arabic on our website.

Please do not hesitate to contact Kristine Beckerle, Yemen and Kuwait Researcher, at [REDACTED] or [REDACTED] should you have any questions.

We thank you for your consideration and look forward to a positive response.

Sincerely,

Sarah Leah Whitson
Executive Director
Middle East North Africa Division
Human Rights Watch

CC:

Anwar Gargash
Minister of State for Foreign Affairs
Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation
Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates

CC:

Deputy Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman
Minister of Defense
Ministry of Defense
Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

CC:

H.R.H. Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid al-Maktoum
Prime Minister and Minister of Defense
Ministry of Defense
Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates