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Open Letter to Drivers, Teams and Performers at the Abu Dhabi F1 Grand Prix 2018

Dear friends,

As you ready yourselves to hold the limelight on the stages and tracks of the final Formula One race of the season, we the undersigned NGOs, wish to draw your attention to the reality of the human rights situation in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), which is a far cry from the glitz and glamour the country intends to project to the world.

Since 2011, the UAE authorities have embarked on a crackdown to silence their critics including human rights defenders, judges, lawyers, academics, students and journalists. They have been harassed, arbitrarily detained, subjected to enforced disappearance, tortured and otherwise ill-treated, and convicted following trials that failed to meet international standards of fairness. Critics and dissidents in the UAE are serving lengthy prison sentences simply for peacefully exercising their right to freedom of expression and we consider them to be prisoners of conscience who should be released immediately and unconditionally.

The UAE authorities have tightened and amended their already repressive laws to further suppress human rights and particularly to silence peaceful dissent and other expression on public issues. As a result, human rights defenders and other critics of the government have been sentenced to lengthy prison terms.

The [UAE](#) is listed as 'closed' on the [CIVICUS Monitor](#) which is the lowest and most oppressive category as far as protection of civic freedoms of expression, association and peaceful assembly is concerned.

Today we are launching a [campaign](#) to call for the release of prisoners of conscience in the UAE and we urge you to lend us your support.

We call upon you, drivers, teams and performers to be the champions of human rights on the circuit and on stage; to be the voices of those who have been silenced and unfairly detained. We urge you to use your celebrity status to call on the UAE authorities to immediately and unconditionally release all prisoners of conscience who have been detained solely for peacefully criticizing the authorities, or for calling or advocating for the respect and protection of human rights.

Please tweet, post and speak about their stories online and in your media appearances so that these prisoners are not forgotten. You can use the hashtags [#AbuDhabiGP](#) [#F1](#) and [#Formula1](#).

These are the stories of some of the hundreds of prisoners of conscience detained for peacefully exercising their rights to freedom of expression:

Blogger and poet **Ahmed Mansoor** is a prominent human rights defender, who received the prestigious Martin Ennals Award for Human Rights Defenders in 2015. He is a member of the advisory committee of Human Rights Watch's Middle East and North Africa Division, as well as of the advisory board of the Gulf Centre for Human Rights (GCHR). He has documented the human rights situation in the UAE

since 2006 and has publicly spoken out in defence of human rights in his blog, social media and in interviews with international media. Up until his arrest on 20 March 2017, Ahmed Mansoor was the last remaining human rights defender in the UAE who had been able to criticize the authorities publicly. On 29 May 2018, Ahmed Mansoor was sentenced to 10 years imprisonment. The trial was held in secret, and there is no public record of the proceedings. It is unclear if he had a lawyer. On 4 October, the European Parliament passed a [resolution](#) calling for his release. He is held in solitary confinement at al-Sadr prison in Abu Dhabi.

Dr Mohammed al-Roken is a prominent human rights lawyer from the emirate of Dubai, and former president of the UAE's Jurists Association. He was arrested on 17 July 2012 and for the next three months, he was held in solitary confinement at an undisclosed location. His fate and whereabouts were unknown in what amounted to enforced disappearance. He was sentenced in July 2013 to 10 years' imprisonment, at the end of the grossly unfair trial of 94 reform advocates which became known as the "UAE 94" trial.

Many of the UAE 94 defendants and others standing trial before the State Security Chamber of the Federal Supreme Court have alleged in court that they were tortured or otherwise ill-treated in pre-trial detention, where they were often held incommunicado for months in secret State Security detention facilities. The State Security Chamber of the Federal Supreme Court has not adequately investigated these allegations, despite mounting evidence that State Security is abusing detainees.

Online activist **Osama al-Najjar** was arrested on 17 March 2014 and sentenced to three years in prison after sending tweets to the Minister of Interior expressing concern that his father **Hussain Ali al-Najjar al-Hammadi** had been ill-treated in prison, where he is serving over 11 years. Osama al-Najjar was due for release from al-Razeen Prison in Abu Dhabi in March 2017, having fully served his prison sentence. However, the authorities decided to extend his detention on the pretext that he remained a threat. Following his arrest, Osama al-Najjar was denied access to a lawyer for over six months. After his arrest he was held in solitary confinement for four days at a secret detention facility where he said he was tortured and otherwise ill-treated.

Prominent economist, academic and human rights defender, **Dr Nasser bin Ghaith**, was arrested in August 2015 and subjected to enforced disappearance for more than seven months. He did not have access to a lawyer until the beginning of his trial in April 2016 and was not allowed to prepare an effective defence. In March 2017, he was sentenced to ten years in prison on charges including "posting false information" about UAE leaders and their policies on Twitter.

Signed:

Americans for Democracy and Human Rights (ADHRB)
Amnesty International
CIVICUS
FIDH, within the framework of the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders
Gulf Center for Human Rights (GCHR)
International Service for Human Rights (ISHR)
Martin Ennals Foundation
Pen International
World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT), within the framework of the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders