

Advocacy dossier

Mohamed Al-Roken

محمد الركن

Imprisoned (serving sentence) **United Arab Emirates**

Mohamed Al-Roken is a human rights lawyer who defended activists and critics of the UAE government. Arrested in 2012, he completed a 10-year sentence in 2022 but was never released. In July 2024 a second mass trial sentenced him to life imprisonment, a verdict made final in March 2025.

01
The case at a glance

Mohamed Al-Roken is a human rights lawyer who defended activists and critics of the UAE government. Arrested in 2012, he completed a 10-year sentence in 2022 but was never released. In July 2024 a second mass trial sentenced him to life imprisonment, a verdict made final in March 2025.

Status**Imprisoned (serving sentence)**	Arrested**12 Jun 2023**	Country**United Arab Emirates**

Sentence Life imprisonment in the UAE84 case (10 July 2024), final since 4 March 2025. This follows ten years in prison and three years of probation in the UAE94 case (2013); the prison term ended in July 2022.

Charges Founding an organisation aiming to overthrow the system of government, Penal Code Article 180 (UAE 94 case)
Terrorism-related charges (UAE 84 / Justice and Dignity case)

What we ask

We call on the authorities to:

01 Release Mohamed Al-Roken immediately and unconditionally.

02 Drop all charges related to the peaceful exercise of fundamental rights.

03 Ensure unrestricted access to legal counsel, family, and adequate medical care while in detention.

04 Immediately end all harassment, summons, surveillance, and threats against the family of Mohamed Al-Roken in United Arab Emirates.

02

Documented violations

Each violation and the international standard it breaks.

Arbitrary detention International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 9

Criminalisation of solidarity International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Articles 21, 22
UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, Article 5

Denial of legal counsel International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 14(3)

Enforced disappearance International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, Article 2
International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Articles 9, 16

Judicial harassment UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, Articles 9, 12

Prolonged pretrial detention International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 9(3)

Reprisal against relatives UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, Article 12

Torture Convention against Torture, Articles 1, 2
International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 7

Unfair trial International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 14

03

How the case unfolded

2003

Defender activity

Attended Front Line Defenders Dublin Platform

Mohamed Al-Roken participated in the Front Line Defenders Dublin Platform, joining a regional network of human rights lawyers and defenders.

November 2011

Defender activity

Defended UAE 5 human rights defenders

Mohamed Al-Roken represented the UAE 5, human rights defenders convicted and sentenced to prison for their work, later released under presidential amnesty.

16 July 2012

Context

Son and son-in-law arrested

His son Rashid and his son-in-law Abdullah al-Hajri were arrested around the time of his own arrest. Rashid was acquitted in the UAE94 verdict on 2 July 2013.

17 July 2012

Arrest

Arrested as part of UAE 94 case

Mohamed Al-Roken was arrested and became one of 94 defendants in a mass trial targeting government critics and reform activists.

17 July 2012

Access to counsel denied

Denied access to lawyer

During detention, Mohamed Al-Roken was denied access to his lawyer and subjected to psychological intimidation.

2013

UN opinion or decision

UN Working Group finds UAE94 detentions arbitrary (Opinion 60/2013)

The UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention found the detention of the convicted UAE94 defendants, including Al-Roken, arbitrary.

27 January 2013

Charge filed

Charged under Penal Code Article 180

The 94 defendants, including Al-Roken, were charged with establishing an organisation aiming to overthrow the system of government.

4 March 2013

Hearing

UAE 94 trial began

The mass trial of 94 government critics, including Mohamed Al-Roken, began before the Federal Supreme Court.

2 July 2013

Conviction

Sentenced to 10 years in prison

Mohamed Al-Roken was sentenced to ten years in prison followed by three years of probation in the UAE 94 trial, with no right of appeal.

2014

Award or recognition

Nominated for Front Line Defenders Award

While imprisoned, Mohamed Al-Roken was nominated as a finalist for the 2014 Front Line Defenders Award for Human Rights Defenders at Risk.

2017

Award or recognition

Awarded the Ludovic Trarieux International Human Rights Prize

While in prison, Mohamed Al-Roken received the Ludovic Trarieux International Human Rights Prize.

17 July 2022

Detention beyond the end of a sentence

Ten-year UAE-94 sentence completed

Al-Roken completed his ten-year prison sentence from the UAE-94 trial. Emirati authorities refused to release him and kept him in al-Razeen prison under the counselling (Munasaha) provisions of the 2014 anti-terrorism law.

March 2023

Call by others

Coalition calls for release on UAE 94 anniversary

A coalition of 13 organizations published a statement calling for the release of all imprisoned following the UAE 94 trial and for investigation of torture allegations.

30 March 2023

UN opinion or decision

UN Working Group finds his detention after the end of his sentence arbitrary

The UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention found his continued detention under the Munasaha regime arbitrary and called for his release and compensation.

12 June 2023

Start of enforced disappearance

Family loses contact; whereabouts unknown

His last call to his family from al-Razeen prison was on 12 June 2023. His family then had no contact with him, and in September 2023 the UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances was asked to clarify his whereabouts.

1 December 2023

Reappearance in custody

Calls his family from an unnamed State Security facility

After nearly six months without contact, he called his family from an unnamed State Security facility.

7 December 2023

Hearing

Brought to trial in UAE 84 case

Mohamed Al-Roken was brought before the Abu Dhabi Federal Court of Appeal on new terrorism-related charges alongside 84 co-defendants in the Justice and Dignity case.

6 January 2024

Referral to trial

State media announces referral of 84 defendants (Case 87 of 2023)

The state news agency WAM announced the referral of the 84 defendants, including Al-Roken, to trial in Case No. 87 of 2023.

10 July 2024

Conviction

Sentenced to life imprisonment (UAE-84)

Convicted in the grossly unfair UAE-84 mass trial and sentenced to life imprisonment, one of 43 defendants given life.

4 March 2025

Final judgment

Federal Supreme Court makes the sentence final

The State Security Chamber of the Federal Supreme Court rejected the appeals in the UAE84 case and upheld his life sentence. The judgment is final.

April 2025

Context

Sons Rashid and Salem detained by State Security

His sons Rashid and Salem al-Roken were detained by the State Security Apparatus and held incommunicado without known charges.

26 June 2025

Context

Supreme Court gives life sentences to 24 co-defendants who had been acquitted

The Federal Supreme Court overturned the acquittal of 24 other UAE84 defendants and sentenced them to life, bringing the life sentences in the case to 67. His own sentence did not change.

04

The full story

Update, 13 May 2026: Al-Roken completed his ten-year UAE-94 sentence on 17 July 2022 but was not released. He was tried again in the UAE-84 "Justice and Dignity" case and sentenced on 10 July 2024 to life imprisonment, one of 43 defendants given life; the Federal Supreme Court upheld this sentence on 4 March 2025. He has been imprisoned continuously since 17 July 2012.

Background and Work

Mohamed Al-Roken is a human rights lawyer who spent his career defending victims of state abuse in the United Arab Emirates. His clients included activists prosecuted under the country's expanding security laws, bloggers targeted for online speech, and fellow human rights defenders facing criminal charges for their work. He represented the UAE 5, a group of defenders convicted and sentenced to prison in November 2011, later released under presidential amnesty.

He attended the Front Line Defenders Dublin Platform in 2003, part of a regional network of lawyers and defenders working across the Gulf. His legal practice made him a prominent voice in a shrinking space for dissent.

The Arrest and the UAE 94 Trial

On 17 July 2012, Mohamed Al-Roken was arrested. He became one of the defendants in what became known as the UAE 94 case, a mass trial of government critics and reform activists. The trial began on 4 March 2013 before the Federal Supreme Court. Among the 94 were human rights defenders, judges, academics, and student leaders.

During his detention, he was denied access to his lawyer. He was subjected to psychological intimidation. Multiple defendants in the trial reported torture and other ill-treatment before and after the proceedings. The trial ended with convictions and lengthy prison sentences for dozens of the accused. Mohamed Al-Roken was sentenced to ten years in prison.

Indefinite Detention After Sentence Completion

In July 2022, Mohamed Al-Roken completed his ten-year sentence. Authorities refused to release him. Under the 2014 anti-terrorism law, prisoners can be detained beyond the end of their terms for what the law calls counseling and rehabilitation. He was transferred to a counseling center inside the prison. The authorities claimed he still posed an ideological threat.

The 2014 counter-terrorism law contains a vague and overly broad definition of terrorism. It treats a wide range of activities protected under international human rights standards as terrorism. The law allows for lengthy prison terms and the death penalty. It has been used systematically to silence critics and extend the detention of those who have already served their sentences.

The UAE 84 Trial and Further Sentencing

On 7 December 2023, Mohamed Al-Roken was brought before the Abu Dhabi Federal Court of Appeal on new terrorism-related charges. He was one of 84 defendants in a case that became known as Justice and Dignity or the UAE 84 case. It was the second-largest security case in UAE history. The

trial proceeded quickly. On 10 July 2024, the court sentenced Mohamed Al-Roken and 42 other defendants to life imprisonment.

He appealed. On 4 March 2025, the State Security Department of the UAE Federal Supreme Court rejected the appeal and upheld the life sentence. The judgment is final.

Legal Context and the Shrinking Space for Dissent

The space for dissent in the United Arab Emirates has contracted sharply over the past decade. In 2012, the government enacted a cybercrime law used to prosecute social media activists and others who defend freedom of expression online. The 2014 counter-terrorism law followed, entrenching the repression with provisions that criminalize a broad spectrum of peaceful activity.

Mohamed Al-Roken has been imprisoned for more than fourteen years. He was convicted twice on security charges for activity that falls within the scope of his work as a human rights lawyer and his peaceful exercise of the rights to freedom of expression and association. He remains in detention with no clear prospect of release.

Recognition and International Response

In 2014, while imprisoned, Mohamed Al-Roken was nominated as a finalist for the Front Line Defenders Award for Human Rights Defenders at Risk. In March 2023, a coalition of 13 organizations published a joint statement calling on the UAE government to release all those imprisoned following the UAE 94 trial solely for peacefully exercising their rights to freedom of expression and association. The statement urged authorities to investigate allegations of torture and ill-treatment, hold those responsible to account, and provide victims with effective remedies and reparation.

Latest updates on this case Scan the code or visit: https://humena.org/defenders/mohamed-al-roken/

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