



General Assembly

Distr.: General
12 February 2024

English only

Human Rights Council

Fifty-fourth session

11 September–13 October 2023

Agenda item 5

Human rights bodies and mechanisms

Written statement* submitted by Maat for Peace, Development and Human Rights Association, a non- governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[22 August 2023]

* Issued as received, in the language of submission only.



Human Rights Defenders in Qatar

Preamble:

Human rights defenders in Qatar still face grave violations that contradict the basic rights granted to them under Qatar's commitments to international human rights standards as well as international human rights conventions ratified by the State, such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). The violations did not limit to human rights defenders, it included women human rights defenders and their children. Such violations included acts of reprisals such as enforced disappearance, arbitrary travel bans, and denial of communication with their families or lawyers.

Maat for Peace, Development and Human Rights Association has been following up on the arbitrary practices to which human rights defenders are subjected. However, it is still surprising that these violations, which human rights defenders in Qatar are exposed to, were not included in the report of the Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders and the report of the Secretary-General on acts of intimidation facing those cooperating with the UN. In this statement, Maat for Peace, Development and Human Rights Association outlines the latest developments in the situation of human rights defenders in Qatar.

First: Enforced Disappearance and Arbitrary Practices against Human Rights Defenders:

On July 30, 2023, Maat for Peace, Development and Human Rights Association received reliable information revealing that Dr. Abd Al-Aziz Al-Ansari was arrested by Qatar State Security and that since his arrest, he was not allowed to communicate with his family and was only permitted to contact the lawyer assigned to defend him once. As of writing this statement, his place of detention remains unknown, which is considered an enforced disappearance. Abdulaziz Al-Ansari is a human rights defender and social activist who forcibly disappeared for expressing his views on Twitter. It is worth noting that Al-Ansari's family still does not know his whereabouts, in grave contradiction to the UN principles relating to the protection of all persons who are subjected to any form of detention or imprisonment⁽¹⁾. Besides, Al-Ansari was reportedly held in solitary confinement. Maat for Peace, Development and Human Rights Association reminds the Qatari government that this procedure should not exceed the permissible limits, as solitary confinement for more than 30 days is inconsistent with Rules 44 and 45 of the UN Supreme Standard Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (Nelson Mandela Rules)⁽²⁾.

In a similar context, Qatar did not provide an appropriate and suitable environment for women human rights defenders (WHRDs). Women who demanded their rights were subjected to intimidation in the workplace, which contradicts the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders⁽³⁾. Noof Al-Maadeed, a 24-year-old woman human rights defender arbitrarily disappeared in Qatar for 150 days before her release, but she was prevented from traveling abroad. On this basis, Al-Maadeed appeared in a number of videos on Twitter criticizing human rights in Qatar, comparing the Qatari government to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. In one of the videos, she addressed the government, saying, "If you hate me, why don't you allow me to leave?" Al-Maadeed posted a video on Twitter in March 2023, showing her asking the government to lift of travel ban; however, members of Qatar State Security bargained with her to leave in exchange for immoral demands. It is worth noting that the practices to which Al-Maadeed is subjected began when the latter criticized human rights in Qatar and the restrictions imposed on women's rights⁽⁴⁾.

Lawyers Hazaa and Rashid Abu Sherida Al-Marri were also subjected to grave violations after the extremely unfair verdict was issued against them. Although more than two years passed since their arrest, the Qatari government is still preventing their brothers from visiting them, in clear violation of Qatari laws and the obligations of Qatar under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)(5). These practices also contradict Principle 19 of the Body of Principles for the Protection of All Persons under Any Form of Detention or Imprisonment, which stipulates that “a detainee or imprisoned person has the right to private visits by his family members and to correspond with them”(6). The arbitrary practices, to which human rights defenders in Qatar were subjected, included deprivation of the use of social media and punishing them with heavy fines for expressing their opinions. Among the examples documented by Maat for Peace, Development and Human Rights Association, on April 13, 2023, a Qatari court ruled to punish blogger A. K. with a fine of 30,000 riyals after tweets on Twitter criticizing the performance of the Qatari Shura Council. The punishment included blocking his electronic account on Twitter, in clear contradiction with international standards that allow the right to freedom of opinion and expression, especially Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and Article 19 of the ICCPR(7).

Second: Children of Human Rights Defenders in Qatar:

Children of human rights defenders face grave violations that contradict the rights guaranteed to them under Qatari laws and international human rights conventions. These children were denied from joining their parents, human rights defenders in Qatar or abroad, and could only meet few numbers. Among the examples documented by Maat for Peace, Development and Human Rights Association is the decade-long arbitrary detention of Sheikh Talal Al Thani(8). The Working Group on Arbitrary Detention stated that Sheikh Talal Al Thani's children were systematically and repeatedly prevented from visiting him, and they only visited their father twice throughout his imprisonment. According to the information received, Sheikh Talal went on strike more than once in prison to allow him to see his children and wife, but in vain. Sheikh Talal's wife also asked more than once to arrange a visit for his children, but her request was denied. The arbitrary practices faced by the children of Sheikh Talal included the freezing of family assets, which forced his wife and their four children to live in inappropriate conditions with his children repeatedly admitted to hospitals(9).

In a related context, Abdullah Al-Maliki's children, a human rights defender and opposition of the Qatari government, faced similar arbitrary practices, as they were not allowed to meet their father but once. It is worth noting that Abdullah Al-Maliki resides in Germany, and on March 9, 2023, and April 11, 2023, he visited the Qatari embassy in Berlin, as well as the Qatari consulate in Munich, Germany, after submitting five requests to the Embassy and Consulate to renew personal documents such as passport and ID; but, the embassy refused all requests.

In the same context, Abdulaziz bin Hamad Al Thani's children, a royal family member, were prevented for about six years from visiting their father due to the arbitrary travel ban imposed by the Qatari authorities. The children of Abdulaziz bin Hamad Al Thani live in Paris, and their father used to live with them. Upon his return, he was prevented from traveling and was not allowed to return. These practices contradict Article 13 of the UDHR, which states that "everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country." These practices also contravene Article 12, paragraph 2, of the ICCPR(10).

Maat for Peace, Development and Human Rights Association, therefore, Recommends the following:

- Disclosure of Abdulaziz Al-Ansari's whereabouts, allowing him to assign a lawyer to defend him and facilitating communication with his family, while ensuring that he receives fair and non-arbitrary trial procedures;

- The need to include the violations against human rights defenders in Qatar in the report of the Special Rapporteur on human rights defenders and the report of the Secretary-General on acts of intimidation against those cooperating with the UN;
- Immediately and unconditionally release human rights defender Noof Al-Maadeed and allowing her freedom of movement under Qatar's obligations under ICCPR;
- Canceling the arbitrary travel ban against Abdulaziz bin Hamad Al Thani allowing him to meet his children abroad;
- Releasing Sheikh Talal Al Thani and allowing him to meet with his children as soon as possible and lift the asset freeze against his property;
- Providing detainees with health care in accordance with the UN rules for the treatment of prisoners "the Nelson Mandela Rules" and the rest of the international treaties ratified by Qatar."

(1) Body of Principles for the Protection of All Persons under Any Form of Detention or Imprisonment, <https://tinyurl.com/pbrpa9md>

(2) The United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners, <https://tinyurl.com/3me4xf9f>

(3) The Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/civic-space/declaration-human-rights-defenders>

(4) See the following link, <https://tinyurl.com/3dc567hp>

(5) See the following link, <https://treaties.un.org/doc/Publication/CN/2018/CN.262.2018-Eng.pdf>

(6) Ibid, <https://tinyurl.com/pbrpa9md>

(7) See the following link, <https://tinyurl.com/4xr25ctm>

(8) Opinions adopted by the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention at its ninety-second session, 15–19 November 2021, page 3, <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/2022-03/A-HRC-WGAD-2021-47-Qatar-AEV.pdf>

(9) Ibid

(10) Universal Declaration of Human Rights, <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>