

**United Nations Human Rights Council  
Universal Periodic Review of the United Arab Emirates**

**I. Background**

1. **Jubilee Campaign**, in special consultative status with ECOSOC, submits this analysis of religious freedom and human rights in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) as a contribution to the Universal Periodic Review.
2. **Set My People Free** is a network of individuals, churches and organizations working for the freedom of converts from Islam to live and practice their new faith, and to experience equality and justice in their homes.

**II. Scope of international obligations and cooperation with international human rights mechanisms and bodies.**

3. The UAE has ratified the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment; the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women; the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination; the Convention on the Rights of the Child; the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children child prostitution and child pornography; and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.
4. The UAE has not ratified the Optional Protocol of the Convention against Torture; the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights aiming to the abolition of the death penalty; the Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance; the Interstate communication procedure under the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance; the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; the Interstate Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families; or the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict.

**Recommendation(s)**

We urge the United Arab Emirates to:

5. Review and ratify the above United Nations conventions and covenants to which it has not acceded.

**III. Violations of international human rights obligations, considering applicable international humanitarian law**

**A. Freedom of thought, conscience, and religion**

## i. Improvements

1. In March 2022, the Institute for Monitoring Peace and Cultural Tolerance in School Education (IMPACT-se) conducted a study on the curriculum used in Emirati public and private schools and reported that it serves as an example for the broader MENA region. Textbook lessons included teachings about interfaith harmony and tolerance, cooperation with people of various faith backgrounds including Christianity and Judaism, the dangers of anti-Semitism, and more. Further, Islamic-specific education highlighted Surahs, Hadiths, and Qur'anic verses which specifically promoted tolerance of non-Muslim peoples, and rejected extremism and violence as tenets of Islam.<sup>1</sup>
2. The United Arab Emirates in January 2022 enacted its new penal code (Federal Law No. 31/2021) which formally eliminated *hudud* crimes (offenses against God's boundaries) which had previously been criminalized in prior penal codes. As such, the removal of *hudud* crimes from the new Penal Code caused the decriminalization of apostasy, or religious conversion or renunciation of faith;<sup>2</sup> previously, the UAE stipulated the death penalty for *hudud* crimes.
3. In early November 2021, late UAE President Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan passed a new family law covering the issues of civil marriage, divorce, inheritance, and child custody; this law permits non-Muslims to apply civil law to such matters rather than Islamic law as they were previously required. According to the new decree, women do not need to receive consent from their families to marry; women are permitted to initiate divorces from their spouses; divorces need not be approved by families; non-Muslims are allowed to draft wills conferring the inheritance of property to a chosen individual; and divorced wives share equal custody of their children.<sup>3</sup> This new law, however, only applies to Abu Dhabi, the capital of the Emirates, and should be extended throughout the nation.
4. Earlier in 2021 in February, the Abu Dhabi Judicial Department, in collaboration with the Indian embassy, granted a birth certificate to the one-year-old daughter of Indian couple Ms. Javeria Masood and Mr. Regulavalasala Tirumala Kalyan Chakravarthy after a year of denying such documentation. According to the previous marriage laws in the city by which a Muslim woman could not legally marry a non-Muslim man, and because Mr. Regulavalasala is Hindu and Ms. Javeria is Muslim, their daughter Suhakshita was considered illegitimate and therefore ineligible to receive a birth certificate.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Marcus Sheff, "[The UAE education system is pushing for peace and religious tolerance. The rest of the region should follow suit.](#)", *Atlantic Council*, 2 March 2022. ; Eldad J. Pardo, PhD, *When Peace Goes to School: The Emirati Curriculum 2016-21*, 20 January 2022.

<sup>2</sup> [Federal Law No. 3 \(Replaced with Federal Law No. 31/2021\)](#) on 2 January 2022.

<sup>3</sup> Ismail Sebugwaawo, "[UAE: Non-Muslim expats hail new family law](#)", *Khaleej Times*, 8 November 2021. ; Ismail Sebugwaawo, "[UAE: New law introduced for non-Muslims; all you need to know](#)", *Khaleej Times*, 7 November 2021.

<sup>4</sup> Hindustan Times, "[A year later, UAE govt grants birth certificate to interfaith couple's child](#)", 19 February 2021.

5. The signing of the September 2020 Abraham Accords marked the establishment of formal diplomatic relations between Israel and the UAE— as well as the United States and Bahrain – and subsequently improved the morale and freedoms of the Emirati Jewish community. In the two years since, thousands of Jews have immigrated to the UAE, the city of Dubai hosts challah-baking parties and weekly Jewish religious services, menorahs are erected for holidays, and kosher restaurants have been popping up across Abu Dhabi. Previously, the nation’s Jewish residents would observe their religious holidays rather clandestinely in unofficial community centers and even personal homes.<sup>5</sup>
6. During the Interfaith Summit at Expo 2020 Dubai, the Emirati Ministry of Tolerance and Coexistence, led by Sheikh Nahyan bin Mubarak Al Nahyan, launched The Global Tolerance Alliance, a platform where world leaders and nations can share experiences and best practices on combatting religious intolerance, promoting interfaith harmony, and engaging with community-based faith actors.<sup>6</sup>
7. In mid-2020, President Russell M. Nelson of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints announced that a temple would be constructed in Dubai. There are approximately 8,000 Latter-Day Saints in the MENA region, and this temple will be the first of its kind in the Middle East to serve LDS members from Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, and Kurdistan-Iraq.<sup>7</sup>
8. In September 2019, the UAE announced plans to construct an interfaith complex in the city of Abu Dhabi which would consist of a synagogue, mosque, and church. In mid-June 2021, the government revealed that the “Abrahamic Family House” – including the now-named Moses Ben Maimon Synagogue, Imam Al-Tayeb Mosque, and St. Francis Church – was approximately 20% built and that it would be likely completed in 2022. In the closing months of 2022, the complex is not yet completed but its construction is still moving forward.<sup>8</sup>
9. The Emirates continue to permit non-Muslim communities to conduct burials and funerals according to the deceased faith’s customs and have set aside land designated for cemeteries. A new draft law on burial of the dead, however, has unfortunately upset many families as they are no longer permitted to bury any deceased family members alongside their relatives who are already buried in the Al Ghusais Cemetery as the cemetery has met capacity. On a positive note, Muslim decedents will be washed and prepared for burial free of charge.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Mona El-Naggar, [“Baking Challah in Dubai: A Jewish Community Heads Out Into the Open”](#), *The New York Times*, 26 April 2022.

<sup>6</sup> Anjana Kumar, [“Watch: UAE launches The Global Tolerance Alliance at Interfaith Summit at Expo 2020 Dubai”](#), *Gulf News*, 16 November 2021.

<sup>7</sup> The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, [“Latter-day Saints Rejoice in Dubai Temple Announcement”](#), 20 May 2020.

<sup>8</sup> Amy Spiro, [“UAE reveals progress on interfaith complex to house synagogue, mosque, church”](#), *Times of Israel*, 16 June 2021.

<sup>9</sup> HHS Lawyers, [“UAE Approves New Draft Federal Law on Burial of the Dead”](#), 12 March 2021.

10. In late 2019 the UAE became the first nation to embark on restoration of Christian churches in Iraq that had been destroyed by ISIS in a project titled “Revive the Spirit of Mosul”. The Emirati Ministry of Culture is partnering with UNESCO to reconstruct Al Tahera Church, Al Saa’a Church, a Yazidi temple, and Al Nuri Mosque.<sup>10</sup>
11. In June 2019, the UAE announced that it would begin the process of legally authorizing 19 non-Muslim houses of worship, including 17 Christian churches.<sup>11</sup>

## ii. Existing Problems

12. Article 7 of the 1971 Constitution of the UAE (Revised 2009) stipulates that Islam is the nation’s official religion and that Shariah is the main source of national legislation; Article 32 guarantees citizens’ right to freedom of religious practice and worship so long as it does not “violate public morals”.<sup>12</sup>
13. Article 312 of the Emirates’ existing and current penal codes stipulate a punishment of at least one year in prison against any individual who commits an act perceived as blasphemous, including “offense to any of the Islamic sacred beliefs or rites”; “insult to any of the divine recognized religions”; “approving, encouraging or promoting sin or [committing] any act that tempts towards committing it”; and “knowingly eating pork meat by Moslems”.<sup>13</sup>
14. Article 317 of the penal code criminalizes proselytism, or “preaching another religion”.<sup>14</sup>
15. Article 319 of the penal code vaguely criminalizes acts such as “opposing” or “vilifying the foundations or teachings on which is based the Muslim religion”, and preaching any religion other than Islam, with a corresponding punishment of no more than five years’ imprisonment.<sup>15</sup>
16. Additionally, Article 4 of Federal Decree Law No. 2 of 2015 On Combating Discrimination and Hatred states that individuals who engage in the following conduct will be charged with blasphemy: “offending, showing contempt or irreverence toward the Divine Entity”; “offending, insulting, challenging, defaming or disrespecting any religion or any of its rituals or sacred things[...].”; “distorting, destroying, desecrating or insulting, in any way, any of the holy books”; and “insulting, disrespecting, offending or defaming one of the messengers or their spouses, family or companions”.<sup>16</sup> Pursuant to Article 5, acts considered blasphemous are punishable with at least five years’ imprisonment and a fine between 250,000 dirhams (≈ USD \$68,000) and 2

<sup>10</sup> Mina Aldroubi, [“UAE to restore Iraqi churches destroyed by ISIS”](#), *The National*, 11 October 2019. ; Knox Thames, [“The UAE is restoring Christian life in the Persian Gulf”](#), *Religion News Service*, 11 February 2022.

<sup>11</sup> International Christian Concern, [“UAE Authorizing 17 Churches”](#), 30 June 2019.

<sup>12</sup> Constitute Project, [\[Constitution\] United Arab Emirates 1971 \(rev. 2009\)](#).

<sup>13</sup> Judicial Department – Abu Dhabi, [Penal Code](#), Legislation Series in English.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> [United Arab Emirates] [Federal Decree Law No. 2 of 2015 On Combating Discrimination and Hatred](#), 15 July 2015.

million dirhams ( $\approx$  USD \$544,500).

17. In November 2021, the UAE Public Prosecutor Office on social media warned civilians against committing blasphemous acts, referring to the above Federal Decree Law No. 2 of 2015.<sup>17</sup>
18. In August 2021, a Malayali ex-Muslim man from Kerala, India, Mr. Abdul Khadar Puthiyangadi, who had been running an IT service company in Dubai, was arrested by Emirati authorities after he reportedly offended Kerala Muslims residing in the UAE by criticizing Islam, the Qur'an, and Hadith; he was sentenced to three years' imprisonment for committing blasphemy and has remained detained since.<sup>18</sup>
19. In November 2020, it was reported that 33-year-old Indian national and UAE resident Akhilesh Pandey was sentenced to 15 years' imprisonment and fined approximately Rs 1 crore ( $\approx$  USD \$122,728) for allegedly committing blasphemy. Pandey's wife Ankita explained she believes her husband to be victim to a frameup by which his coworkers – one Sudanese national, one Pakistani national, and two Indian nationals – at Union Cement Factory in Ras Al Khaimah accused him of “hurting religious sentiments” and disrespecting the UAE.<sup>19</sup>
20. In January 2020, three Sri Lankan nationals who were employed as security guards at a hotel resort in Dubai were arrested after they had allegedly committed blasphemy by insulting Islam on their personal Facebook accounts. Each defendant was fined 500,000 dirhams ( $\approx$  USD \$136,125) and was deported.<sup>20</sup>
21. In July 2019, a 26-year-old Moroccan national and UAE resident was arrested after he verbally insulted his employer and, when confronted, subsequently allegedly “uttered blasphemous words”. It was reported that he stood trial in September 2019 and would receive his sentence on 16 September but we have received no further updates on his case.<sup>21</sup>
22. As per constitutional provision, Islamic sharia is the primary source of legislation and penal matters in the UAE, though it operates alongside criminal and civil law. Sharia law is most frequently applied in civil cases between self-identifying Muslims; however, Sharia law can be applied at the federal level against Muslim and non-Muslim citizens alike, stipulating antiquated and inhumane punishments (i.e., flogging, lashes, amputations) for violent crimes (i.e., rape, abuse, murder), non-violent crimes (robbery/theft) and even non-violent conduct that is not deemed criminal by the majority of the world's nations (i.e., homosexuality, public displays of affection, dressing ‘immodestly’, cross-dressing, consensual sexual activity between adults, etc.).

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<sup>17</sup> Samihah Zaman, “[UAE Public Prosecution warns residents against acts of blasphemy, religious intolerance](#)”, *Gulf News*, 9 November 2021.

<sup>18</sup> The Hindu, “[Release of Malayali rationalist sought](#)”, 19 September 2021.

<sup>19</sup> P. Naveen, “[Husband in UAE prison for blasphemy, Ujjain woman pleads to PM Narendra Modi for help](#)”, *Times of India*, 12 November 2020.

<sup>20</sup> Mariam Nabbout, “[Three men fined \\$400,000 in the UAE for insulting Islam online](#)”, *Step Feed*, 21 January 2020.

<sup>21</sup> Marie Nammour, “[Jobless man charged for blasphemy in Dubai](#)”, *Khaleej Times*, 9 September 2019.

Other punishments which are typically regarded as cruel and inhuman forms of torture – such as chemical castration, physical and psychological torture, and forced hormone injections – have been meted out in the UAE as per the Penal Code which largely adheres to Sharia law and Islamic jurisprudence.<sup>22</sup>

23. All public schools in the Emirates are obligated by the Ministry of Education to teach Islamic studies to students regardless of their faith. Contrastingly, all private schools are required to offer Islamic courses to their students, but such classes are only mandatory for Muslim students. Private schools which are affiliated with Christian organizations are permitted to teach Christian students in their faith and are required to also provide Islamic courses to any Muslim students; ironically, however, private schools who teach material which is allegedly offensive to Islam face closure and instructors can face penalties.<sup>23</sup> In 2004 and 2005 respectively, an unidentified private school teacher was terminated for reportedly insulting Islam<sup>24</sup>, and two students of Victoria English Private School were suspended for “affronting” Islam.<sup>25</sup>
24. Dissimilar to Abu Dhabi where the newly introduced family law provides greater freedoms to non-Muslims in civil and domestic affairs, the remainder of the Emirates still abide by Federal Law No. 28 of 2005 (amended 2020), also referred to as the Personal Status Law, which is restrictive of interfaith marriage. According to this legislation, a Muslim man is only permitted to marry a non-Muslim woman if she is “a believer of one of the Revealed religions” of Christianity or Judaism. Furthermore, Muslim women are entirely prohibited from marrying non-Muslim men. Finally, for a marriage to be valid it must be attended by two Muslim witnesses, unless the betrothed woman is a Christian or Jew, in which case the witnesses can be of those revealed religions.<sup>26</sup>
25. In late June 2021, Emirati authorities forcibly disappeared and deported no fewer than four Pakistani nationals and six other foreign individuals on account of their Shi’ite Muslim faith; all of the men had been residing and working in the UAE for years as business managers, sales workers, CEOs, laborers, and drivers. This is not an unprecedented act, as in previous years such as 2013 and 2015, the government deported Lebanese, Iraqi, Afghan, and other Pakistani Shia residents. Human Rights Watch interviewed the family members of the recently deported Pakistani men; many reported hearing of other similar recent cases in which long-term foreign Shia Muslim residents were arrested publicly or in midnight home raids, detained in undisclosed locations for weeks at a time, and subsequently deported.<sup>27</sup>
26. As in previous years, Emirati customs and border authorities have continued to seize various items they believed – but had no evidence – were related to

<sup>22</sup> George SK, “[Sharia Law and the UAE: What You Need to Know](#)”, *Legal Reader*, 12 November 2021.

<sup>23</sup> Khaleej Times, “[UAE: No change in policy regarding teaching of Islamic studies in schools](#)”, 2 September 2022.

<sup>24</sup> Mohsen Rashid, “[Teacher fired for blasphemy](#)”, *Khaleej Times*, 4 March 2004.

<sup>25</sup> Mohsen Rashid, “[Two private school students suspended for blasphemy](#)”, 20 February 2005.

<sup>26</sup> United Arab Emirates’ Government Portal, [Federal Law No. 28 Issued on 2005/11/19 On Personal Status](#) [amended 2019/08/29, 2020/08/25, and 2020/09/27].

<sup>27</sup> Human Rights Watch, “[UAE: Arbitrary Targeting of Pakistani Shia Residents](#)”, 22 June 2021.

witchcraft, including amulets, stones, talismans, books, jewelry, and more; some items whose images were released have been subsequently identified as objects related to West African spiritual traditions.<sup>28</sup>

27. The Emirates continues to exercise unjustifiable internet censorship which, in addition to blocking websites and content depicting drugs, alcohol, LGBTQ+ relationships and interactions, gambling, and sexual material, also restricts websites that publish non-Muslim “religious content” or are otherwise critical of Islam.<sup>29</sup> More and more Emiratis are using virtual private networks (VPNs) to circumvent government censors.

## **Recommendations**

We urge the United Arab Emirates to:

28. Propose a federal law similar to the Abu Dhabi secular family law which would allow non-Muslims to choose to apply civil and non-Islamic laws to issues of marriage, divorce, and custody;
29. Repeal Articles 312, 317, and 319 of the Penal Code and Article 4 of Federal Decree Law No. 2 of 2015, both of which continue to criminalize blasphemy and proselytism, and release prisoners of conscience which have been unjustly detained and sentenced for alleged blasphemy;
30. Permit non-Muslim faith and spiritual communities to engage in peaceful proselytism;
31. Revise or amend Federal Law No. 28 of 2005 to permit consensual interfaith marriages – including the marriages of Muslims to faith practitioners beyond just Christians and Jews;
32. Cease the practice of illegally detaining and deporting foreign nationals of minority faiths including Shia Islam;
33. Cease the practice of unjustly blocking websites and online material which education on non-Muslim religions.

## **IV. Gender-Based Violence (GBV) & Violence against Women and Girls (VAW)**

### **A. Improvements**

34. A 2019 survey conducted by University of Sharjah PhD student Ghanima Al Bahri upon men in Dubai shed light on Emirati men’s general attitude and perception towards domestic violence against women. While the UAE has taken numerous steps to encourage gender equality and women’s participation in the realm of society, education, and the workforce, the issue of violence

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<sup>28</sup> Manny Moreno, [“Dubai customs seizes witchcraft items”](#), *The Wild Hunt*, 4 June 2021.

<sup>29</sup> Theodor Porutiu, [“Censorship in the UAE: How to Get Around it”](#), *VPN Overview*, 6 August 2021.



against women in the home has been historically neglected. This survey revealed that  $\approx 80\%$  of Emirati men strongly disagree that a man has the right to commit violence against his spouse and  $\approx 73\%$  disagree that violence against women can be used as a form of discipline. Interestingly, however,  $\approx 40\%$  of respondents reported that domestic violence is a common problem in the UAE, and  $\approx 78\%$  expressed the need for public awareness and violence prevention programs in Emirati society. The researcher proposed that the low rate of tolerance for violence against women among Emirati men could be due to (1) the recent implementation of family and women protection laws; (2) economic stability, as financial hardship is one of the most common catalysts of violence in the home; and (3) high education and literacy rates.<sup>30</sup>

35. In 2019, the UAE enacted both the Family Protection Policy to Prevent Domestic Abuse and Federal Decree Law No. 10 of 2019, which (1) criminalize six forms of domestic violence – physical abuse, verbal abuse, psychological abuse, sexual abuse, financial abuse, and negligence; (2) grant the Public Prosecution Authority the ability to issue protection orders to victims of domestic violence; and support the work of the Dubai Foundation for Women and Girls.<sup>31</sup>
36. In November 2020, the UAE reported that it would be “cancelling lenient penalties for so-called ‘honour killings’” and that such crimes would now be tried as normal murder cases with the set punishment of life imprisonment. Under previous legislation, judges could issue “merciful sentences” ranging from just 3 to 15 years in prison if the woman or girl victim was judged as “dishonoring” the family.<sup>32</sup>
37. The UAE passed the Federal Decree Law No. 33 of 2021 which specifically combats forms of *structural* violence women face in the workforce by (1) guaranteeing equal pay for women as their male counterparts performing the same job; and (2) prohibiting employment discrimination based on gender.<sup>33</sup>
38. In February 2022, the Emirati Ministry of Community Development launched a system called *Soun* (translates to “safeguard” in English), a mobile application “for early detection of possible abuse of any individual’s right, through answering a set of questions that show the extent to which a person has been harmed, and guide him/her on what to do and the responsible party”. *Soun* includes educational videos on what constitutes physical, emotional, and psychological violence; provides the app user with phone numbers and relevant hotlines to report incidents of abuse; and can determine based on the user’s response to questions whether the user is currently experiencing abuse, is vulnerable to future abuse, and whether the user needs specialized

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<sup>30</sup> Ghanima Al Bahri, “Emirati Males’ Attitudes Toward Domestic Violence Against Women in the U.A.E: A Sample from Dubai”, *University of Sharjah College of Arts, Humanities & Social Sciences Department of Sociology*, 2019.

<sup>31</sup> Sunil Ambalavelil, “Domestic Violence in the UAE: A Guide to Legal Measures if You Face Violence”, *The Law Reporters*, 6 November 2021.

<sup>32</sup> Reuters, “UAE cancels lenient penalties for ‘honour killings’”, 7 November 2020. ; DW, “UAE gets rid of ‘honor’ killing defense in major legal overhaul”, 11 July 2020.

<sup>33</sup> Ismail Sebugwaawo, “Emirati Women’s Day: How UAE laws, policies have changed over time to empower women”, *Khaleej Times*, 23 August 2022.



intervention and consultation. Because the app is available in Arabic and English and is easily digestible, it is accessible to individuals of all ages as well as foreign expats.<sup>34</sup>

39. Also in 2022, to coincide with the launch of *Soun*, the UAE Ministry of Community Development published a *Family Protection Guide*, which (1) outlines types of domestic violence [physical, sexual, psychological, economic, verbal], (2) discusses communities vulnerable to abuse [women, children, disabled, elderly]; (3) lists the causes and methods of abuse; (4) lists prevention and de-escalation tactics; (5) teaches how to develop a safety plan; and (5) teaches victims the mechanisms and channels to report incidents and seek protective services.<sup>35</sup>

## B. Existing Problems

40. In 2021, Human Rights Watch outlined some persisting obstacles to the elimination of violence against women in the UAE, including (1) that domestic violence laws “reinforce male guardians’ ability to discipline their wives”; (2) the lack of criminalization of marital rape; (3) that men are permitted to withdraw financial support if their wives refuse to engage in sexual relations with him; (4) that the minimum punishment for honor killings is just seven years’ imprisonment; and more.<sup>36</sup>
41. In May 2018, a Dubai International Airport police officer who was arrested for the violent rape of his airline worker fiancée during a ride in his car was originally convicted and sentenced to six months of imprisonment. The defendant appealed his sentence on the grounds that he was actually already married to the victim, as according to Islam, marriage only requires a (1) proposal, (2) acceptance, and (3) declaration. The defense attorney argued in court that because the couple were technically married, “he [the defendant] did not rape her but had marital sex”, and the Dubai Court of Appeal suspended the sentence.<sup>37</sup>
42. In March 2018, Indian forces collaborating with the Emirates abducted Sheikha Latifa bint Mohammed bin Rashid al-Maktou, the daughter of UAE Prime Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, and forcibly repatriated her to the Emirates where she was detained against her will in a villa “converted into a jail” at the request of her father who was permitted to do so according to laws upholding male guardianship. She was subsequently released over two years later in June 2021. Previously, at the turn of the millennium in 2000, UAE authorities were recruited by Prime Minister Al Maktoum to abduct Latifa’s older sister, his daughter Shamsa, while she was attempting to flee the country. She was forcibly returned to the Emirates and has not been seen in public since.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Ramola Talwar Badam, “UAE ministry launches system to help victims of domestic abuse”, *The National*, 25 February 2022. ; Khaleej Times, “UAE innovates: Mobile app for early detection against potential abuse launched”, *Zawya*, 26 February 2022.

<sup>35</sup> United Arab Emirates Ministry of Community Development, *Family Protection Guide 2022*, 2022.

<sup>36</sup> Human Rights Watch, “UAE: Greater Progress Needed on Women’s Rights”, 4 March 2021.

<sup>37</sup> Salam Al Amir, “Police officer who raped woman claims she was his wife and wins appeal”, *The National*, 10 May 2018.

<sup>38</sup> Rothna Begum, “The UAE must release Latifa and Shamsa and stop denying women basic rights”, *The Guardian*, 8 February 2021.

43. In June 2022, 20-year-old Jordanian woman and engineering graduate Lubna Mansour was attacked while in her car by her attacker – a man who is alleged to be her current or former partner – who stabbed her to death before driving the vehicle, with her body still in it, to a nearby beach. When he was apprehended by Emirati authorities two hours later, he admitted to committing the murder due to “personal differences” he had with the victim Ms. Mansour. Authorities have since transferred the perpetrator to Public Prosecution and have warned the public not to release the CCTV footage depicting the killing.<sup>39</sup>

### **Recommendations**

We urge the United Arab Emirates to:

44. Conduct legal reform which would abolish the practice of male guardianship and thus proffer women, and especially spouses, more freedom of choice in the home, workforce, and education, and would discourage honor killings.
45. Enact a provision in the national penal code or a separate legislation which recognizes and criminalizes instances of marital or spousal rape.

## **V. Violence against Children (VAC), Child Neglect & Other Rights Violations**

46. Federal Law No. 3 of 2016 on Child Rights (Wadeema’s Law) outlines the child’s rights to (1) life and security; (2) privacy; (3) growth and development; (4) an adequate standard of living; (5) education; (6) protection from child abuse, neglect, rejection, homelessness, and trafficking; (7) freedom from child labor and exploitation; and more. Also according Article 60 of the law, any individual who is charged with committing any act which “endangers the mental, psychological, physical or moral integrity of the child” via abandonment, rejection, and neglect, is liable to imprisonment and/or a fine.<sup>40</sup>
47. In March 2022, Emirati Deputy Prime Minister Lt. General Sheikh Saif bin Zayed Al Nahyan reported a 34% decrease in the number of cases of online sexual exploitation of children.<sup>41</sup>
48. On World Children’s Day in 2021, the UAE’s Digital Wellbeing Council and Ministry of Interior’s Child Protection Center collaborated with Meta (formerly Facebook) to launch the “*Report it. Don’t Share it.*” social media campaign teaching users to report illegal images and content depicting child

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<sup>39</sup> Tala Michel Issa, “[Arab woman stabbed to death in UAE’s Sharjah, police catch killer in two hours](#)”, *Alarabiya News*, 26 June 2022. ; Salam Al Amir, “[Sharjah Police warn public against sharing video of young woman’s death](#)”, *The National*, 28 June 2022.

<sup>40</sup> [United Arab Emirates] *Federal Law No. 3 of 2016 on Child Rights (Wadeema’s Law)*, 3 August 2016.

<sup>41</sup> Ismail Sebugwaawo, “[UAE: Major decrease in online sexual exploitation cases against children, says minister](#)”, *Khaleej Times*, 15 March 2022.

sexual abuse.<sup>42</sup>

49. In 2020, it was reported that eleven governments spearheaded by the Abu Dhabi-based International Security Alliance had conducted a child protection and rescue operation in which they rescued 549 children from “harm and exploitation”, arrested 771 suspects, and blocked 580 websites and apps which were used to facilitate the sharing of materials depicting sexual abuse of children.<sup>43</sup>

## A. Existing Problems

50. Despite the inclusion of Article 60 of the aforementioned Federal Law No. 3 of 2016 which criminalizes the act of “endanger[ing] the mental, psychological, physical or moral integrity of the child”, this wording is very vague and there exists no specific law criminalizing specific acts of child abuse<sup>44</sup> [with the exception of filming, producing, distributing, and possessing child pornography, which is punished with imprisonment for upwards of 10 years’ imprisonment and/or a hefty fine]<sup>45</sup>.
51. In June 2022, it was reported that the number of child abuse cases in the UAE had raised to 243 from just 103 in 2020. Dr. Ali Mohammed Al Matrooshi, Director of women’s and children’s protection at the Dubai Police’s General Department of Human Rights, reported that the rise in incidents can be attributed to the COVID-19 pandemic and corresponding lockdown through which children were confined to the home with potential abusers. Of the 243 cases recorded, 50 were for child mistreatment, 58 were for physical abuse, and 35 were for denying children education. The vast majority of perpetrators in these cases were the victims’ relatives, including their fathers (69 cases), their mothers (31 cases), “familiar persons” or acquaintances (20 cases), and school staff (6 cases). Victims ranged between 11 and 18 years of age.<sup>46</sup>
52. A 2021 study on the prevalence of child neglect and maltreatment in the UAE and its relation to rates of depression and other mental disorders among the population revealed that of the 201 male and 317 respondents (mean age 14.3 years  $\pm$  1.3 years), 33.9% reported being subjected to emotional abuse, 12.6% physical abuse, and 12.1% neglect. Emotional abuse and Neglect were both strongly associated with lower rates of self-esteem and higher rates of depressive symptoms and substance abuse. The report also revealed that male children were more vulnerable to emotional and physical abuse, whereas girls were more susceptible to neglect.<sup>47</sup>

## Recommendations

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<sup>42</sup> Arab News, “[Meta launches new campaign to fight online child abuse](#)”, 22 November 2021.

<sup>43</sup> Dhanusha Gokulan, “[549 kids rescued from sexual abuse in major operation by UAE-based International Security Alliance](#)”, *Khaleej Times*, 5 December 2020.

<sup>44</sup> Dr. Hassan Elhais, “[Child Protection Laws in the UAE](#)”, *HG*.

<sup>45</sup> Ramola Talwar Badam, “[Punishments for offenders of UAE’s Child Protection Law include 10 years in jail](#)”, *The National*, 27 August 2016.

<sup>46</sup> Salam Al Amir, “[Stronger child protection laws lead to rise in abuse reports, Dubai police say](#)”, *The National*, 22 June 2022.

<sup>47</sup> Syed M. Shah, Gul Nowshad, Fatima Al Dhaheri, Mariam H. Al-Shamsi, Alfian M. Al-Ketbi, Alaa Galadari, Priyam Joshi, Heba Bendak, Michal Grivna, & Danilo Arnone, “[Child maltreatment and neglect in the United Arab Emirates and relationship with low self-esteem and symptoms of depression](#)”, *International Review of Psychiatry*, 9 June 2021.

We urge the United Arab Emirates to:

53. Enact a law which specifically criminalizes specific acts of child abuse, violence against children, and neglect;
54. Take observable measures to combat the rise in domestic abuse targeting children during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown