

Oman Pre-session Statement – UPR November 2025

Gulf Centre for Human Rights

On behalf of the Gulf Centre for Human Rights, please accept our thanks for this opportunity to raise issues of concern at this stage of Oman's UPR process. This presentation is based on a [Joint Submission](#) by the Oman Center for Human Rights and Democracy and GCHR.

GCHR is an independent NGO that works to provide support and protection to human rights defenders (HRDs) in the MENA region by promoting freedom of expression, association, and peaceful assembly.

This presentation will cover four topics: the Freedoms of: Expression (including the New Media and Nationality laws), Peaceful Association, and Assembly along with the silencing of civil society including human rights defenders.

Regarding the International Legal Framework (Slide)

We note that Oman has not adopted the ICPPR, the 1961 Convention on Statelessness, the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture. Furthermore, while it has signed the Rome statute it has not ratified it.

Regarding Freedom of Expression (Slide)

In most recent version of the Basic Law, which acts as the constitution, Article 35 states, "Freedom of opinion and the expression of it through speech, writing, and all other means of expression is guaranteed **within the limits of the law.**" Article 97 of the Omani penal code states "Whoever commits, publicly or by publication, a challenge to the rights of the Sultan and his prerogatives, or disgraces his person, shall be punished by imprisonment for a period no less than (3) three years and not exceeding (7) seven years." Article 115 punishing false news or news that harms the state has also been used to silence dissent.

The new Media Law has even more restrictions than the law it replaces. The government can simply order news outlets not to report on stories, as they did with a terrorist attack in July 2024. Furthermore, the law prohibits publishing information on investigations or trials until verdicts are issued. Lastly, the law allows for the revocation of a license for any

institution on grounds described by the law as pertaining to "national security requirements".

We urge states to recommend: (1) changes to article 97 and 115 of the penal code and stop using it to suppress peaceful dissent,(2) to amend the new Media Law to remove provisions that can be used to silence dissent, (3) to amend the Nationality law, as discussed by the co-panelist from OCHRD.

Regarding Freedom of Association **(Slide)**

Despite UDHR article 20, which guarantees the right to form associations, Articles 116-118 of the penal code criminalise associations and their actions that peacefully oppose state activity and include activities such as organizing political participation.

We suggest recommendations to have Oman: (1) Take measures to foster a safe, respectful and enabling environment for civil society, including by removing legal and policy measures that unwarrantedly limit the freedom of association. (2) Specifically, by amending articles 116-118 that criminalise members of associations that oppose government policies, thereby allowing civil society to participate fully.

Regarding peaceful assembly

We note that the government response to protests includes violence and criminal penalties. In April 2025, the Court of First Instance issued a one-year prison sentence and a fine of 500 Omani riyals against internet activist and religious preacher Talal bin Ahmed Al-Salmani, after convicting him of the misdemeanour for participating in a peaceful gathering on 7 April 2025, in Muscat, in solidarity with the people of Gaza where he also harshly criticised the government.

We urge general recommendations to (1) Bring national legislation, notably Articles 121 and 123 of the penal code, on freedom of peaceful assembly into line with international standards, particularly by removing the penalty for unlicensed public gatherings. And (2) Adopt best practices on the freedom of peaceful assembly, as put forward by the 2012

report of the UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights to Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and of Association, which calls for simple processes for the notification of assemblies being held rather than permission being required,

Regarding harassment, intimidation and attacks against human rights defenders, civil society activists and journalists **(Slide)**

We urge recommendations to (1) provide civil society members, HRDs and journalists, especially women, with a safe and secure environment in which to carry out their work. (2) Undertake a consolidated process of repeal or amendment of legislation and decrees that unwarrantedly restrict the legitimate work of HRDs, in line with the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders. And (3) End the practice of using the judicial system to try HRDs, journalists and anyone else for peacefully exercising their rights to freedom of expression, assembly, and association.

Thank you for your attention. The full recommendations are in our submission.