

## HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL – 54th SESSION

### Adoption of the final outcomes of the reports of the Universal Periodic Review Working Group for the United Arab Emirates 03 October 2023, Geneva

The United Arab Emirates received 323 recommendations in the course of the review session of its fourth periodic report on 8th May 2023

198 recommendations were accepted.

125 recommendations were noted.

The outcome of the review was presented by H.E. Mr. Ahmed Abdulrahman Ahmed Al Jarman, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of the United Arab Emirates in Geneva, who expressed his country's intention to strengthen cooperation with the National Human Rights Committee and its hopes to benefit from technical assistance from the UN mechanisms.

The UAE invited the Special Rapporteur on the Right of Education, and the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities to visit the country and holds the intention to invite other Special Rapporteurs and respond to previous requests for visits that have been received. The overwhelming majority of States called for the adoption of the outcomes.

Regarding **strengthening the national human rights framework**, the UAE has been working on developing a **national human rights plan**. At the institutional level, the government has established the **National Human Rights Institution**, in accordance with the Paris Principles.

On issues related to **women's rights and gender equality**, the Council of Ministers adopted in August 2023 a **National Strategy for Emirati Women for 2023-2031**. The UAE expressed its intention to withdraw some reservations from the **CEDAW**.

These positive steps have been welcomed by **Nigeria, Oman, Pakistan, Tunisia, Tanzania, and Sierra Leone**. Recent laws to ensure equal pay, parental leave, and gender balance have been positively noted by **UN Women**, along with the efforts in women's representation in leadership, particularly at the ministerial level and in corporate boards. The NGO **Citoyens en action pour la démocratie et le développement** also noted the national plan for women peace and security, and the 2026 gender parity strategy.

On issues related to **children's rights**, the UAE expressed its intention to accede to the **Optional Protocol of the Convention on the Rights of the Child** and withdraw some reservations to the Convention.

The UAE's National Family Policy and the Family Protection Policy received positive mentions, including from **Nigeria, the United Republic of Tanzania, and the Syrian Arab Republic**.

On the **rights of workers**, the UAE reported undertaking several legislative reforms such as Federal Decree-Law No. 33 of 2021 concerning the regulation of labor relations. A number of initiatives have been launched such as the **unemployment insurance system**.

These reforms have been positively noted by **Nepal**, while **Sierra Leone** welcomed the abolition of indefinite contracts in the aforementioned law. **The Philippines** welcomes the acceptance of its recommendations to continue constructive engagement with

labour sending countries in order to strengthen protection mechanisms for migrant workers.

Concerning action to **combat human trafficking**, all the recommendations have been accepted by the UAE. In July 2023, the Council of Ministers adopted a number of **amendments to the law combating human trafficking**, creating more severe punishments for those crimes and supporting victims.

The positive steps were noted by the **Philippines** and **Tunisia** expressed satisfaction with the recent definition of torture in line with article 1 of the Convention Against Torture.

On the **independence of the judiciary**, Federal Decree-Law No. 32 of 2022 on the Federal Judiciary has been enacted.

The NGO **Advocates for Human Rights** commended Indonesia for recommending that the Government of the UAE strongly consider establishing and implementing alternative sentencing outside capital punishment and/or other appropriate remedy mechanisms in serious cases involving migrant workers. This NGO as well as **Amnesty International** expressed disappointment that the UAE noted this recommendation and rejected the recommendation to release prisoners who have completed their sentences or prohibit secret detention.

On issues of **freedom of religion or belief** and **freedom of opinion and expression**, the UAE adopted in September 2023 Federal Decree-Law No. 9 of 2023 on places of worship for non-Muslims across the country and is working to prepare a new draft law to replace **Federal Law No.15 from 1980 Concerning Publications and Publishing** to bring regulation of the media, including digital media, in line with international standards.

The new law on religious freedom was positively noted by **Tunisia**, and **Pakistan** welcomed the national program for tolerance.

States and NGOs also highlighted areas of improvement. **Sierra Leone** recommended the UAE reconsider the ratification of the second Optional Protocol to the ICCPR and the Optional Protocol to the UN Convention against Torture.

The **United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland** expressed its disappointment that the UAE has not accepted our recommendation to guarantee the rights of freedom of opinion and freedom of expression and for peaceful assembly in line with international human rights law.

The NGO **Citoyens en action pour la démocratie et le développement** expressed the same view. **Human Rights Watch** welcomed Costa Rica's recommendation to the UAE to guarantee and reserve freedom of expression, assembly, and association in all spaces for all people and ensure that activists, lawyers, journalists, and academics can operate without fear of reprisals and allow broad civil society participation in COP 28. Human Rights. Regarding freedom of opinion and expression, freedom of peaceful assembly, criminal justice, protection of inmates in penal facilities, and taking measures against torture, many NGOs expressed great concerns, particularly given the **UAE's presidency of COP28 which requires the full and meaningful participation of civil society**. The NGO **CIVICUS**, the **Gulf Centre for Human Rights and International Service for Human Rights**, and **Human Rights Watch** expressed concern and disappointment at the current laws that criminalize any speech that harms the reputation of the state. These organizations brought attention to the group of detainees known as *the UAE Ninety-Four*, of which 60 activists are still detained past the completion of their sentences.

**The British Humanist Association** expressed concerns regarding laws criminalizing blasphemy, including provisions of the new Federal Crimes and Punishments Act (the

Penal Code) of January 2022. **Advocates for Human Rights** and **International Services for Human Rights** were concerned that the UAE rejected recommendations for authorities to ensure a safe environment for human rights defenders.

Delegates welcomed other positive steps such as the adoption of a specific law on **the rights of elderly persons** mentioned by the **Russian Federation, Singapore, and Sri Lanka**.

The UAE's **national policy for the empowerment of people with disabilities** has been positively noted by the **Syrian Arab Republic and Sri Lanka**.