

Dear Mohammed,

On the tenth year of your long imprisonment in the desert prison of Al-Razeen in the United Arab Emirates, your country, a question that haunted me during my years of imprisonment returns to my mind: why do our lives seem so cheap and expendable? Why do our regimes arrest, torture, and imprison writers and defenders of justice?

One may think of two intersecting answers to this question: firstly, regimes do so because they fear the truth and truth-tellers and secondly, they do so because they are able to. They can arrest, torture, and mistreat people, as the Emirati regime did to you, without fearing any consequences. Such impunity obliterates the difference between crimes and politics. And if there is a lesson to be learned from the history of my country, Syria, it is that where there are excessively harsh punishments for no crimes - as it is in your case, and as it was in mine - there are atrocious crimes that go unpunished: state crimes.

Dear Mohammed, there is no reasonable justification for your imprisonment, be this for ten years, ten months, or even ten days. There is only one right thing to do: to have you released from the 'Emirati Guantanamo' now.

I have read about the place in which you are being imprisoned, Al-Razeen (what a name!¹); it reminds me of the prison in Syria where I was held, Tadmur prison. I learned that the Emirati authorities have taken many measures to fortify and isolate Al-Razeen prison. They have hired foreign guards and jailers who do not speak Arabic, so detainees cannot exchange words with them, as if they were building a linguistic wall in addition to the physical walls of the jail. In Tadmur prison, the guards and jailers spoke Arabic, but we were not permitted to raise our heads or look into their eyes while speaking to them. This was another psychological wall in that terrible labyrinthine torture camp. The ban on visits, which is a punishment not only for the detainees, but for their families too, also brings the two desert prisons closer together, as does the limitation of prayer.

¹ Al-Razeen in Arabic means 'sedate,' or the dignified and gentle person.

However, whatever the walls are, they cannot restrain a spirit as free and just as yours. For their arrogance and thoughtlessness, those who arrest writers and human rights activists are gravely mistaken. They can crush and destroy us, but they cannot crush our words and our just causes. On the contrary, words are enriched with greater meaning when they come from experiences as cruel as yours.

I hope that the authorities have stopped torturing you with loud music, solitary confinement, and arbitrary and humiliating searches, and that adequate health care is available to you. Take care of your health, please. The struggle is long, and the world at large lacks alternatives and reserves of hope today. We are waiting for you to be free and among us, with renewed energy. We have a lot to fight for.

Yassin Alhaj Saleh