

Mandates of the Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment; the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention; the Special Rapporteur on the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health and the Independent Expert on the enjoyment of all human rights by older persons

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(Please use this reference in your reply)

6 July 2026

Excellency,

We have the honour to address you in our capacity as Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment; Working Group on Arbitrary Detention; Special Rapporteur on the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health and Independent Expert on the enjoyment of all human rights by older persons, pursuant to Human Rights Council resolutions 61/10, 60/8, 60/10 and 60/11.

In this connection, we would like to bring to the attention of your Excellency's Government information we have received concerning Mr. Ryan Cornelius, a national of the United Kingdom, resident in Bahrain at the time of the events described herein, who has been determined to be arbitrarily deprived of his liberty in the United Arab Emirates since 21 May 2008, following a questionable conviction for fraud arising from a real estate loan extended by the Dubai Islamic Bank. Mr. Cornelius was the subject of opinion No. 19/2022 of the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention.

Mr. Ryan Cornelius, now 72 years of age, was not released at the expiration of the 10 year sentence in 2018, and it is alleged that he is now being held pursuant to an arbitrary extension of his imprisonment by 20 years in proceedings that violate pertinent international standards. It is further alleged that Mr. Cornelius is being held in conditions of detention that fall below international standards for the humane and dignified treatment of persons deprived of liberty; and, owing to his age and prolonged detention and conditions, his health is reported to be rapidly and progressively deteriorating.

Given his age and health, and the continued arbitrary deprivation of liberty, we therefore respectfully urge the United Arab Emirates to release Mr. Cornelius without delay. At a minimum, the United Arab Emirates is under an obligation to take all necessary measures to protect his life and preserve his health, and to avert irreparable harm, including potentially fatal consequences.

According to the information received:

Mr. Ryan Cornelius is a British businessman who, since the 1980s, worked extensively in the Middle East, principally in the fields of property, construction, and engineering.

In 2004, together with business partners, he secured a 99-year lease over approximately 450 acres of land in Dubai, which was subsequently developed

as the “Plantation”, a vast equestrian and property venture project on the outskirts of Dubai.

The project was financed through a credit facility arranged by CCH, a German finance house, which in turn obtained its funding through a credit facility provided by the Dubai Islamic Bank (“DIB”). Mr. Cornelius and his co-investors were not direct borrowers from the DIB; rather, their relationship with the bank arose through CCH’s own financing arrangements.

Following the onset of the global financial crisis in late 2007, the DIB called in its credit facility to CCH. A restructuring agreement was subsequently negotiated, pursuant to which Mr. Cornelius agreed to act as guarantor and pledged both the “Plantation” development and his personal assets as security for a three-year repayment schedule.

The DIB allegedly gave undertakings that it would not pursue either criminal or civil proceedings provided that the parties complied with the restructuring arrangements. Repayments, under these arrangements, were reportedly made on schedule.

Notwithstanding that, on 21 May 2008, Mr. Cornelius was arrested at Dubai International Airport. He was apprehended by plain-clothed police officers, his mobile telephone was confiscated, and he was transferred to Dubai police headquarters in an unmarked vehicle with his hands bound with zip ties.

As he entered the building, a hood was placed over his head. He was thereafter subjected to an allegedly hostile interrogation in the absence of any legal representation. Following several hours of questioning, officers presented him with a typed document in Arabic, a language he neither speaks nor reads, and informed him that he would be free to return to Bahrain upon signing it.

Mr. Cornelius signed the document without being able to understand its contents. He was subsequently taken into solitary confinement and kept for approximately six to seven weeks, during which he was denied access to family members, legal representatives, and healthcare.

In the meanwhile, the DIB served notice of alleged breaches of the loan restructuring arrangements and assumed control of the “Plantation” development, together with Mr. Cornelius’s other businesses and personal assets.

Mr. Cornelius was held in a situation of deprivation of liberty for approximately two years before being brought to trial in 2010. The initial proceedings were conducted in Arabic, and no interpreter was provided. His court-appointed defence counsel did not speak English. Mr. Cornelius was therefore unable to understand the proceedings against him and was reportedly prevented from addressing the court at any stage.

The judge originally assigned to the case found that the evidence was insufficient to sustain a conviction and indicated that more senior DIB

executives ought to be investigated. Reportedly, that judge was subsequently removed from the proceedings. A retrial was ordered, and fresh charges were brought against Mr. Cornelius, specifically “theft from a public body” or “embezzlement of State funds.”

The ensuing proceedings were reportedly conducted in a summary manner, to the prejudice of the defence. Mr. Cornelius’s counsel was reportedly prevented from effectively examining the prosecution’s evidence, and the identity of the complainant remained undisclosed.

On 27 April 2011, Mr. Cornelius was convicted of embezzlement of State funds and sentenced to ten years’ imprisonment. He was further ordered to repay approximately 501 million US dollars (USD) and fined an additional USD 500 million. His conviction was subsequently upheld by the Dubai’s Court of Appeal and Court of Cassation.

Mr. Cornelius served his sentence in Al-Awir Central Prison, Dubai. Although documented as a model prisoner, he was denied the sentence reductions ordinarily available under domestic law as of right for good behaviour.

The conditions of his detention at Al-Awir have been consistently described as overcrowded and unsanitary. His cell was shared with multiple other prisoners. He was subjected to persistent cold, sleep deprivation, and extreme temperatures. Access to fresh fruit and vegetables was almost entirely absent, as the prison does not provide them and they were difficult to procure.

His only available exercise consisted in running in the prison courtyard or the corridor adjacent to his cell; this activity progressively aggravated his back and joint conditions. At times, access to the courtyard was denied for weeks owing to a shortage of prison staff.

In March 2018, shortly before the expiry of his ten-year sentence, Mr. Cornelius was reportedly taken without prior notice to a judge’s office. He was subsequently informed that his imprisonment had been extended by a further 20 years on the basis that a debt allegedly remained unpaid. This extension was purportedly imposed pursuant to Dubai Law No. 37 of 2009, a law that entered into force on 31 December 2009, more than a year after the commission of the offences for which Mr. Cornelius had been accused and convicted, and nearly two years after his initial arrest.

Mr. Cornelius received no advance notice of the proceedings that resulted in the extension of his sentence. He was afforded no meaningful opportunity to make representations or to challenge the extension before it was imposed. When he sought to appeal against the extension, prison authorities allegedly refused to transport him to the court, with the consequence that the appeal was dismissed on the ground of his non-attendance.

Due to the extension of his conviction, Mr. Cornelius would not be eligible for release until May 2038, when he would be 84 years of age.

In parallel with the criminal proceedings in Dubai, the DIB brought civil proceedings in Bahrain against Mr. Cornelius, before the Bahrain Chamber for Dispute Resolution. In April 2020, the Chamber concluded that the collateral and payments made to the DIB had fully discharged the indebtedness arising under the restructuring arrangements, and that the claims advanced against the guarantors, including Mr. Cornelius, were entirely without merit. The Chamber found that the value of assets transferred to and seized by the DIB exceeded the outstanding loan by over USD 70 million.

While the judgment was final and not subject to appeal, it was reportedly overturned, within approximately four months of the ruling, allegedly as a result of a personal intervention of a senior figure associated with the DIB directly with the Bahraini authorities.

According to reports, Mr. Cornelius's physical and mental health progressively deteriorated over the course of his now more than eighteen years of deprivation of liberty.

In late 2019, he developed latent tuberculosis, allegedly left untreated for approximately eighteen months, while prison records are said to have falsely indicated that he had refused treatment. In addition, Mr. Cornelius contracted COVID-19 on two separate occasions. He also suffers from hypertension, elevated cholesterol, borderline diabetes, chronic back and knee pain, recurrent infections, elevated prostate-specific antigen levels suggestive of potential prostate pathology and has experienced cognitive deterioration. Requests for medical treatment were allegedly ignored.

Mr. Cornelius's dental health also severely deteriorated. When he was taken to a dental clinic in April 2025, the dentist reportedly explained that he would refuse to treat him because his medical records indicated that he had refused treatment for tuberculosis, which would pose a risk to other patients.

Prison authorities have also reportedly attempted to coerce Mr. Cornelius into signing a document asserting that his human rights were being respected.

On 31 May 2022, the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention issued opinion No. [19/2022](#), concluding that Mr. Cornelius's deprivation of liberty was arbitrary and in violation of multiple provisions of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The WGAD called for his immediate and unconditional release, together with compensation and other forms of reparation.

In 2024, following Mr. Cornelius's seventieth birthday, his legal representatives applied for his release on the basis that both the UAE Constitution and article 7(1) of Dubai Law No. 37 of 2009 expressly prohibit the continued imprisonment of debtors who have reached the age of seventy years. The application was rejected on 18 July 2024.

Subsequent and separate appeals for clemency, lodged since January 2023, have likewise failed to elicit a positive response.

While we do not wish to prejudge the accuracy of these allegations, the reported allegations, if established, could amount to violations of Mr. Cornelius's right to life, protected by article 3 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR); his right to be free from torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, including the requirement of humane treatment in detention, protected, *inter alia*, by article 5 of the UDHR and, at least, by articles 1, 2 and 16 of the Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT), ratified by the United Arab Emirates in 2012; his right to health recognised, as part of the right to an adequate standard of living, in article 25 of the UDHR; his right to a fair trial, protected by article 10 of the UDHR; as well as his right to liberty and security of person and against arbitrary detention, set forth in article 9 of the UDHR.

We stress that, by depriving persons of their liberty, States assume responsibility to care for their lives and bodily integrity and must take all necessary measures to protect them. We raise serious concern that inadequate conditions of detention and standards of treatment may present an immediate or longer-term danger to life and health; and stress that the denial of health care could lead to consequences tantamount to torture and/or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

Persons deprived of liberty must always be treated in a humane manner and with respect for their inherent dignity. They shall have access, *inter alia*, to effective legal representation and adequate medical assistance; prompt judicial review of their initial and continuing deprivation of liberty; remedies for any violations; and have the possibility to communicate with a lawyer of choice, their relatives, and to be visited by independent human rights monitoring bodies. In the case of foreigners, they shall also be promptly informed of their right to communicate with a consular post or the diplomatic mission of the State of which they are nationals. Persons deprived of liberty also have the right to be informed at the time of arrest of the reasons for their arrest, and subsequently of any charges brought against them.

We recall that the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners ("Nelson Mandela Rules") affirm the responsibility of States to provide prisoners with food of nutritional value adequate for health and strength (rule 22); and health care free of charge without discrimination (rule 24), paying special attention to those with special healthcare needs (rule 25). They indicate that prisoners requiring specialized treatment shall be transferred to specialized institutions or to civil hospitals (rule 27). Rule 58 further requires that prisoners shall be able to communicate with family members at regular intervals by correspondence and receiving visits. Family visits shall never be restricted for disciplinary measures and can only ever be restricted for a limited time for the purposes of maintaining security and order (rule 43). We also remind that conditions of detention must be suitably adapted to a person's age and capacities.

Furthermore, in relation to the allegation that Mr. Cornelius was placed in solitary confinement for approximately seven weeks, we emphasize that indefinite and prolonged solitary confinement are prohibited under international human rights law (rule 43). Prolonged solitary confinement is defined as confinement of prisoners for longer than 22 hours per day without meaningful human contact (rule 44). Prolonged solitary confinement, which is prohibited as a form of torture, is understood to be isolation that exceeds 15 consecutive days (rule 44). Long term solitary confinement

can cause very serious and irreparable harm to individuals. For this reason, solitary confinement shall be used only in exceptional cases as a last resort, for as short a time as possible and subject to independent review, and only pursuant to the authorization by a competent authority. It shall not be imposed by virtue of a prisoner's sentence (rule 45).

We are also alarmed at the substantial irregularities in the legal proceedings, including possible violations of the customary right to a fair trial (article 10, UDHR) containing *inter alia* the right to: legal representation; a fair and public hearing by a competent, independent and impartial tribunal established by law; access to proper interpretation of all documents and proceedings in a language and manner that the person understands; that persons shall not be imprisoned for being unable to pay a contractual obligation; the non-retroactive application of laws; and that unlawfully obtained confessions and other tainted evidence shall be excluded from proceedings (see also article 15 of the CAT).

Based on the findings of the WGAD, we also reiterate that the arrest and subsequent detention of Mr. Cornelius is arbitrary, in violation of article 9 of the UDHR, and additionally point out, as it may be alleged in the present case, that arbitrarily detaining foreign nationals under fabricated, false or exaggerated charges with the purpose of using them for financial, political or other forms of leverage also constitutes a violation of the absolute prohibition against taking hostages, set forth, *inter alia*, in the International Convention Against the Taking of Hostages, acceded by the United Arab Emirates 2003. Hostage-taking may give rise to psychological torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment depending on the circumstances of arrest or detention in violation of the CAT; likewise, such circumstances can inflict pain and suffering on family members. We refer you to the Special Rapporteur on torture's report on hostage-taking as torture [A/HRC/58/55](#).

In light of the foregoing, we respectfully request that Mr. Cornelius be provided with urgent, adequate and comprehensive medical care, treatment and monitoring of his health situation, as appropriate, in a civil hospital, without delay. We stress that time is of the essence.

We also respectfully urge your Excellency's Government to ensure the immediate and unconditional release Mr. Cornelius. The circumstances of his arrest, conviction and sentencing and continued deprivation of liberty must be effectively investigated, pursuant to international standards, and those found responsible of any violation, must be held accountable with appropriate penalties.

The full texts of the human rights instruments and standards recalled above are available on www.ohchr.org or can be provided upon request.

In view of the urgency of the matter, we would appreciate a response as soon as possible on the initial steps taken by your Excellency's Government to safeguard the rights of the above-mentioned person(s) in compliance with international instruments.

As it is our responsibility, under the mandates provided to us by the Human Rights Council, to seek to clarify all cases brought to our attention, we would also be grateful for your observations on the following matters:

1. Please provide any additional information and any comment you may have on the above-mentioned allegations.
2. Please provide updated and detailed independent medical assessment on the present state of physical and mental health of Mr. Ryan Cornelius. Please explain what measures have been taken, or may be envisaged to be adopted, to protect his life and preserve his health and well-being, including timely access to adequate medical care, and treatment in a civil hospital, as appropriate; and improvement in detention conditions.
3. Please provide detailed and updated information on the conditions of Mr. Cornelius's deprivation of liberty, his second trial and conviction, and please assess them against international human rights law and standards, particularly the absolute prohibition of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, including the requirement of humane and dignified treatment in detention, and the UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners ("Nelson Mandela Rules"), and other rights outlined in this communication.
4. Please provide information on measures taken, or envisaged to be adopted, to implement opinion No. 19/2022 of the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention regarding Mr. Cornelius's arbitrary deprivation of liberty. Please explain whether there has been any investigation in this connection, and please provide the results of it, including in terms of accountability of persons possibly found responsible of any violation. If there has been no investigation, please explain why.

This communication, and any response received from your Excellency's Government, will be made public via the communications reporting [website](#) at the 60 days mark. Should Your Excellency's Government respond within 60 days, both the communication and the response, may be published before the 60 days mark. The communications and responses will also be made available in the subsequent periodic report to be presented to the Human Rights Council.

While awaiting a reply, we urge that all necessary interim measures be taken to halt the alleged violations and prevent their re-occurrence and in the event that the investigations support or suggest the allegations to be correct, to ensure the accountability of any person(s) responsible for the alleged violations.

We may publicly express our concerns in the near future as, in our view, the information upon which the press release will be based is sufficiently reliable to indicate a matter warranting immediate attention. We also believe that the wider public should be alerted to the potential implications of the above-mentioned allegations. The press release will indicate that we have been in contact with your Excellency's Government's to clarify the issue/s in question.

Please be informed that a copy of this letter will also be sent to the Permanent Mission of Bahrain and to the Permanent Mission of the United Kingdom, in Geneva.

Please accept, Excellency, the assurances of our highest consideration.

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punishment

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