

Human Rights Watch

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<https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/06/07/tribute-artur-ligeska-former-prisoner-uae>

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[Artur Ligksa](#), a 40-year-old Polish citizen who has spoken out widely about torture and ill-treatment in Emirati prisons, was [found dead](#) in his apartment in Amsterdam, the Netherlands on May 26, 2021. The Gulf Centre for Human Rights and Human Rights Watch are deeply saddened by the news of his death and extend their sincere condolences to his friends and family.

Following his release from al-Sadr prison in May 2019, Artur dedicated himself to seeking justice for the abuse he and other prisoners suffered in prison, especially Ahmed Mansoor, an award-winning human rights defender who is on the advisory boards of GCHR and Human Rights Watch. Artur was a uniquely valuable source of information on prison conditions in the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

He was an activist, author, and fitness expert and had recently celebrated the second anniversary of his acquittal on May 9. He had been sentenced to life in prison in the UAE following a deeply flawed trial on drug charges despite the absence of any evidence of drugs in his possession.

In a voice message to a friend at GCHR on May 9, Artur said, My main wish for this new-life birthday is freedom for Ahmed Mansoor. I really do hope that this year will be special for him. I was thinking all day about him. I remember our last talk, and I was thinking about his wife and kids. In the last days, Ahmed told me Dont forget about me.

Artur said he was planning to organize a protest in The Hague soon to call for Ahmeds release. Arturs many actions to help Ahmed included advocacy with Polish and EU officials, providing human rights groups with information, taking part in human rights events, documentary films and TV appearances, and writing about Ahmed in his two books.

Artur first phoned GCHR staff in April 2019 to tell them that [Ahmed was on a hunger strike](#) and told them that he was worried that Ahmed might die because his health had deteriorated greatly. He told GCHR that Ahmed was being held in terrible conditions in a cell with no bed, no water, and no access to a shower. Ahmed today remains in a 2-by-2 meter isolation cell with no bed or mattress, serving a 10-year prison sentence for his human rights activities.

Despite suffering serious trauma after suffering abuse as a prisoner in the UAE, Artur again phoned GCHR to share the good news that human rights groups advocacy had been successful. Ahmed had ended his hunger strike after being allowed to phone his ill mother and to go outside to see the sun for the first time in two years. Artur sacrificed phone calls to his own family to make calls on behalf of Ahmed, referring to him as a brother.

Following his release, Artur was able to [provide GCHR with more details](#) about what he called the medieval prison conditions in al-Sadr prison, including periods when there was no running water despite extreme heat.

In a wide-ranging interview released by Human Rights Watch in January 2020, Artur described how he and Ahmed had become [prison mates in UAE hell](#). Artur spent eight months in al-Sadr prison, in solitary confinement in a cell beside Ahmeds. His friend suffered psychological torture from a near-total lack of human contact and access to the library, Artur said.

Artur told GCHR that after he left the UAE, he had undergone surgery and therapy to treat the damage done by the rape and psychological torture that he said he was subjected to but he was recovering well and taking classes to become a journalist and human rights professional.

On April 13, 17 European Parliament members [wrote](#) to the EUs High Representative Josep Borrell to express their deepest concern over the ongoing human rights violations in the United Arab Emirates, particularly with regards to the systematic crackdown on freedom of speech and expression and the subsequent retaliation received during detention. The letter mentions Ahmed, and also refers to Artur, noting, The use of torture has not been limited to Emirati nationals, as there have also been instances of EU citizens that have reported facing brutal torture at the hands of prison authorities.

On October 22, 2020, Amnesty Westminister Bayswater and GCHR held an online event, [The Prisoner and the Pen](#), featuring the writing, songs and poetry of prisoners who are human rights defenders and the work of writers and artists from the Middle East and North Africa region. The event, held on Ahmed 's birthday, included his poems. Artur read from his memoir, [The Sheikhs Different Love](#), published in 2019 in Polish. He has also written a second bestselling book in Poland, [Prison Diary](#). His story is documented in a film by Hossam Meneai, [Isolation Cell 32](#), which debuted at the [Polish Film Festival in America](#) in November. Artur also appears in an upcoming documentary about Ahmed Mansoor made by Manu Luksch.

Arturs untimely and unexpected death comes as a great shock to those who knew him. The Dutch police are investigating the circumstances of his death.

How the United Arab Emirates Silenced its Most Famous Human Rights Activist

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