

BRISMES statement on the detention of Matthew Hedges.

HH Sheikh Mohammad Bin Rashid Al Maktoum
Prime Minister's Office
PO Box: 212000
Dubai, United Arab Emirates
info@primeminister.ae

HE Sheikh Saif bin Zayed Al Nahyan
Minister of Interior
Zayed Sport City, Arab Gulf Street, Near to Shaikh Zayed Mosque
PO Box: 398, Abu Dhabi
United Arab Emirates
moi@moi.gov.ae

HE Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan
Minister of Foreign Affairs
Al Bateen, King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz Al Saud Street
Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates
info@mofa.gov.ae

HE Sulaiman Hamid Almazroui
Ambassador of the United Arab Emirates to the United Kingdom
LondonEmb.Info@mofaic.gov.ae

Your Highness, Your Excellencies,

Mr Matthew Hedges is a PhD student in the School of Government and International Affairs (SGIA), Durham University. On 5 May 2018, he was arrested at Dubai International Airport as he was leaving the UAE.

For nearly six months, Matthew has been held in solitary confinement at an undisclosed location in Abu Dhabi. He has had very limited access to British consular authorities and access to legal representation was only granted a few weeks ago. Information about his case and the reasons for his detention were withheld from his family, Durham University and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. It is only in the last week that the UAE authorities have charged him with espionage on behalf of a foreign power. We believe this charge to be totally without foundation.

Matthew was in the UAE to conduct a series of interviews for his PhD thesis which examines the role of civil-military relations in the UAE post-Arab spring. We understand that he had permission to be there and to meet officials with knowledge of civil-military relations in the Emirates. Since his detention, Matthew's physical health and mental well-being have deteriorated. He was forced to sleep on the floor for the first few weeks after his arrest, denied access to proper shower facilities and prevented from receiving any reading material that might help allay his mental anguish. He has since expressed suicidal thoughts in the brief communications he has had with friends and family. The conditions in which he has been kept are degrading and inhumane and violate UN and internationally accepted practices over the detention of individuals.

The British Society for Middle Eastern Studies calls upon the Emirati authorities to release Matthew Hedges without delay. No supporting evidence has been produced to justify the charge against him. His continuing detention will compel many British universities to reassess the UAE as a safe place for scholarly research, despite the efforts of the UAE government to encourage educational exchanges between institutions in the UK and the UAE. By his unjustified detention, prolonged arrest in solitary confinement, lack of access to proper legal advice and limited consular access, Matthew's rights have been and continue to be denied by the UAE authorities.

Yours sincerely,

Stuart Laing, President of the British Society for Middle Eastern Studies
On behalf of the BRISMES Council