Zeynab Javadli and her three daughters: the letters of 27 October 2026 to H.E. Lana Nusseibeh

On 27 October 2026 international human rights lawyer David Haigh, who represents Zeynab Javadli, and Zeynab herself each wrote to Her Excellency Lana Nusseibeh, the UAE Minister of State and the UAE's candidate for Secretary-General of the United Nations, asking her to help. On 3 November 2026 Mr Haigh wrote to her again, enclosing both letters. No reply has been received. The two letters of 27 October follow. Personal addresses, contact details and signatures have been removed.

Her Excellency Lana Nusseibeh

Minister of State, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the United Arab Emirates (on leave)
Candidate for Secretary-General of the United Nations

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David Haigh
[redacted]

27 October 2026

Her Excellency Lana Nusseibeh
Minister of State, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the United Arab Emirates
Candidate for Secretary-General of the United Nations

By email: info@lananusseibeh.org; copy to the Permanent Mission of the United Arab Emirates to the United Nations, NYUNPRM@mofaic.gov.ae

Your Excellency

Re: My client Zeynab Javadli and her three daughters

1. I am David Haigh, a British human rights lawyer. In 2021 I was confirmed as the first known British victim of the UAE's use of Pegasus spyware. I advised Sheikha Latifa bint Mohammed Al Maktoum and co-founded the Free Latifa campaign. I have advised Randa Al Banna, the first wife of Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Ruler of Dubai. I assisted the legal team of Princess Haya bint Al Hussein, headed by Baroness Shackleton. I now advise Zeynab Javadli, the former wife of Sheikh Saeed bin Maktoum bin Rashid Al Maktoum, a nephew of the Ruler of Dubai, and I have helped hundreds of others who have suffered injustice in Dubai and the wider United Arab Emirates.

2. I write in good faith. I have nothing against the UAE or its rulers. I have only ever helped those who asked me for help.

3. Please accept my congratulations on your nomination as a candidate for Secretary-General of the United Nations. Having noted the commitments you have made in your vision statement, I enclose a letter from my client Ms Javadli. It is her own account, in her own words. I ask you to read it before you address the General Assembly today.

4. As I am sure you and your team are aware, there are many in the human rights world who are critical of your nomination and of what it could mean. Those criticisms go to the record of the United Arab Emirates on human rights, and in particular on the rights of women and girls. I am not writing to argue that with you. But Ms Javadli has been told, time and again, that there is no law and no process for her, because her former husband is an influential member of the ruling family, and that nothing can be done. If you were to step in and secure for her nothing more than proper, fair due process, you would show that this is not so. That one act would answer many of your critics better than any speech could.

5. Ms Javadli has not seen her three daughters since they were taken from her home at midnight on 2 June 2026. She was held by State Security for five days, accused of kidnapping her own children and of cybercrime offences, and placed under a travel ban. In the months since she has been neither formally charged nor brought before a court. The prosecution has not proceeded. The video calls with her daughters ordered by the Dubai Execution Court in July have never taken place. Her father is gravely ill in Azerbaijan and she cannot go to him. She has reported a threat to her life.

6. Her requests are simple and are within the gift of the government in which you serve as Minister of State: that she be reunited with her daughters, who had lived with her all their lives until the night they were taken, and in the meantime that she see them now, as the court ordered; that the accusations against her be charged and heard, or closed; that the travel ban be lifted so that she can reach her father; and that her safety and her mother's be guaranteed.

7. I would welcome a meeting with you, or if you prefer with one of your advisers, privately and in confidence, to discuss Ms Javadli's case. Ms Javadli has also instructed Rodney Dixon KC, who would be happy to meet you or your team. Similarly, I am sure that Ms Javadli's long-standing lawyer in Dubai, Ms Samira Gargash, would be willing to meet you, although she has now retired from practice. As I am sure you know, Ms Gargash was a pioneer among Emirati women in the legal profession. Ms Javadli's current lawyer in Dubai is Mr Mukhtar Al Ghareb, who would also be willing to meet you. I would add this. If you were to help uphold the due process and the human rights to which Ms Javadli and her daughters, citizens of both the United Arab Emirates and Azerbaijan, are entitled under the law of the United Arab Emirates and under the United Nations instruments to which it is a party, those actions, as they should be, would be clear evidence that you are able to stand up for people whose human rights are being abused and where due process is not being followed. I for one would say so to those who criticise your candidacy.

8. Eleanor Roosevelt, who chaired the drafting of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, asked: "Where, after all, do universal human rights begin? In small places, close to home, so close and so small that they cannot be seen on any maps of the world... Such are the places where every man, woman, and child seeks equal justice, equal opportunity, equal dignity without discrimination. Unless these rights have meaning there, they have little meaning anywhere." For Ms Javadli and her daughters, that small place was their home, on the night the girls were taken from it. You have said that a Secretary-General must speak frankly with every government. I ask you to do so with your own, on this one case, and to let me know what you have done. I can be reached at the email address above.

Yours sincerely



David Haigh
Solicitor (non-practising)

Enclosure: letter from Zeynab Javadli dated 27 October 2026

Zeynab Javadli
Dubai
United Arab Emirates

27 October 2026

Her Excellency Lana Nusseibeh
Minister of State (on leave)
Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates
and c/o the Permanent Mission of the United Arab Emirates to the United Nations, New York

URGENT
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Re: my daughters, and my request for your help

Your Excellency,

My name is Zeynab Javadli. I am writing to you because you are a Minister of State of the United Arab Emirates, on leave from your post while you ask the nations of the world this week to make you Secretary-General of the United Nations. Your government nominated you. It describes you as its Minister of State in the letter that did so. I do not think a few weeks of leave put my daughters beyond your reach. In your vision statement you promised that under you there would be no exemptions for friends and no grudges against critics. I am not your friend and I am not your critic. I am a mother in Dubai who has not seen her three daughters since 2 June 2026, and I am asking you to help me.

I came to the UAE from Azerbaijan. I competed for my country in rhythmic gymnastics at world championship level. In 2015 I married Sheikh Saeed bin Maktoum bin Rashid Al Maktoum. We have three daughters. We divorced in 2019. For several years the courts of Dubai gave me custody of our girls, and in 2022, after I made a complaint to the United Nations, an agreement was reached, approved by the Ruler of Dubai, Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum himself, that they would stay with me until they were eighteen, with a home and support, in return for my withdrawing that complaint. I withdrew it. I kept my side of the agreement. I attach the 2022 complaint for your information.

My daughters had never spent a day outside my care. They have always lived with me. On 9 April 2026 the final appeal on custody went against me and the court ordered that my daughters be returned to their father, with force if necessary. At midnight on 2 June 2026 my home was attacked by people who identified themselves as Dubai Police and State Security. It is a house that was given to me by the Ruler of Dubai. I was drugged. My daughters were taken from their beds, screaming, in the middle of the night. I have not seen them since. I was taken too. I was held in prison by State Security for five days without being able to tell anyone where I was. On 8 June 2026 I was released on police bail. I was accused of kidnapping my own children, of two offences under the cybercrime law for the messages I had posted on Instagram asking for help, one of them a message to the United Nations, the organisation you now seek to lead, and I was told of fourteen further complaints. To this day I have not been formally charged with any of them. A travel ban was placed on me, and on my mother. My daughters were not returned.

That was 147 days ago. In those 147 days I have not been allowed to see my daughters once. In July the Execution Court ordered that I should at least have a supervised video call with them for one hour every Saturday. Not one of those calls has taken place. Each week there has been a new form, a new condition, a new reason. I have signed what I was asked to sign, including an undertaking not to record a single second of a call with my own children. I have written to the court in English and in Arabic asking it simply to fix a date and tell me how my daughters are. I am still waiting for an answer.

Nothing has happened on the criminal side either. The prosecution has not proceeded. Since June there has been no charge, no hearing, no interview, no investigation that I have been told of, and no decision. The complaint against me from November 2025 has never been determined. I am not charged. I am not on trial. I am not free. I am held in a country I cannot leave, under accusations that are neither brought nor dropped, away from children I am not allowed to see. I have been told different things by different people about what I am actually accused of, and to this day I do not have a clear answer. I do not know how long this is intended to last. Nobody will tell me. The United Nations has a name for being held like this, without a trial and without an end: arbitrary detention. That is my position. My British King's Counsel, Rodney Dixon KC, is setting it out in full in a complaint to the United Nations this week, and I will send you a copy once it is filed.

In all this time there has been one sign of my daughters. My former husband does not use social media. Recently a photograph of one of our daughters was posted online from his side, and people connected to him made sure that it reached me. I was not sent it so that I could see that she was well. I was sent it so that I would know that others could see my daughter and I could not. I have no other word for that than cruelty.

My mother is elderly. She lives with me and she cannot leave the country either. My father is elderly and seriously ill, and is undergoing surgery in Azerbaijan. I cannot go to him. I may not see him again. I ask you to think, as a daughter, what that is.

I am also afraid for my life. During this dispute my former husband told me that I would go the same way as Sheikha Bouchra. You will know, as I did, who she was and what became of her. I have reported what was said to me. I write it here so that it is on the record, in my own words, in case anything happens to me.

I am not asking you to take my side in a custody case. I am asking for four things that are within the power of the government you serve. First, that my daughters be returned to me, as the agreement approved by the Ruler of Dubai provides. They have lived with me all their lives. Until that happens, that I be allowed to see them, in person, now, as the court itself ordered in July. Second, that the accusations against me be either charged and brought to a hearing without further delay, or closed, so that I know what I face. Third, that the travel ban on me and on my mother be lifted so that I can go to my father while he is alive, and come back to my children. Fourth, that my safety and my mother's be guaranteed while this is resolved.

I am not asking for anything other than due process. That is the whole of my complaint: due process has not been followed. When you are up against a member of the ruling family, as my former husband is, you are told, as I have been told time and again, that there is no due process and there is no law, because he is a sheikh. This could be your moment to show otherwise. If I may be so bold, that one action would prove many of the critics of your candidacy wrong.

Eleanor Roosevelt, who chaired the drafting of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that you now ask to uphold, said that universal human rights begin in small places, close to home. Three small girls in Dubai are as close to home as it gets.

I am writing to you privately. This letter is confidential, and I am sending it to you before anyone else so that you have the chance to act. I would be grateful for your reply urgently, but within seven days please.

I ask you, as a woman and a daughter, and as a minister of the country where my daughters are, please help me.

Yours sincerely,

[redacted]

Zeynab Javadli

Enclosure: my complaint to the United Nations of 6 October 2022