PRESS RELEASE

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DUBAI ROYAL'S EX-WIFE APPOINTS LEADING UK BARRISTER TO COMPLAIN TO THE UNITED NATIONS ABOUT THE TORTURE AND ABUSE OF HER AND HER DAUGHTERS AT THE HANDS OF DUBAI

- Zeynab Javadli has appointed leading international human rights barrister Rodney Dixon KC, who represented Princess Latifa before the United Nations, to file an urgent complaint against the United Arab Emirates with the United Nations over her torture and ill-treatment and the seizure of her three daughters
- Her former husband is a nephew of Dubai's ruler, Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, whom the High Court in London found had ordered the abduction of his own daughters, Sheikha Shamsa and Sheikha Latifa, and run a campaign of intimidation against his wife, Princess Haya
- In 2022 Zeynab made a first complaint to the UN. When it reached the media, Dubai told her to stop speaking out and to drop it, and in return let her keep her daughters. An uneasy peace held for three years. Dubai has now torn it up
- In June 2026 armed, masked officers stormed her home at night, beat and drugged her and took her daughters from their beds. She has not seen them since, and is on trial in Dubai for kidnapping her own children. Judgment was due on 18 November; instead the judge withdrew from the case and it goes to a new judge
- In a video message to the United Nations, Zeynab says: "The last thing my girls saw was their mother beaten and drugged on the floor of our home. The last thing I heard was their screams"

LONDON, 19 November 2026: Zeynab Javadli, the former wife of a senior member of Dubai's ruling family, has instructed leading international human rights barrister Rodney Dixon KC of Temple Garden Chambers, who represented Princess Latifa before the United Nations when UN human rights experts called for her immediate release in April 2021, to file an urgent complaint against the United Arab Emirates with the United Nations, it was announced today.

Ms Javadli, 35, a former world championship gymnast from Azerbaijan, was married to Sheikh Saeed bin Maktoum bin Rashid Al Maktoum, a son of the former Ruler of Dubai and a nephew of the present Ruler, Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum. In 2020 and 2021 the High Court in London, in proceedings brought by Sheikh Mohammed's former wife Princess Haya, found that he had ordered the abduction and forced return to Dubai of two of his daughters, Sheikha Shamsa and Sheikha Latifa, and had conducted a campaign of fear and intimidation against Princess Haya. Zeynab and Sheikh Saeed have three daughters: Sheikha Sanaa, 10, Sheikha Asia, 8, and Sheikha Salama, 7.

The complaint goes to the UN Human Rights Council's Special Procedures in Geneva: the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, the Special Rapporteur on Torture, the Special

Rapporteur on Freedom of Opinion and Expression, the Special Rapporteur on the Independence of Judges and Lawyers, and the Working Group on Discrimination against Women and Girls. It asks the UN to intervene urgently with the UAE, to raise the whereabouts and welfare of the three girls, and to investigate Ms Javadli's arrest, detention and treatment in custody in June 2026, when she was beaten, injected with drugs, held by State Security for six days without a lawyer, interrogated blindfolded and, she says, forced under duress to record a video confession. The complaint alleges arbitrary detention, torture and ill-treatment, violations of her freedom of expression, the absence of an independent judiciary and discrimination against her as a woman and a mother.

Silenced under duress, in fear for her life

This is the second time Ms Javadli has turned to the United Nations. In October 2022 Mr Dixon filed a first complaint on her behalf, alleging abuse, harassment and intimidation by the Dubai authorities during her custody battle with her former husband. The BBC and the Daily Mail reported it within days.

What happened next was never made public until now. Within hours of the BBC report, senior Dubai Police officers came to Ms Javadli's hotel and told her they were there on the direct instruction of the Ruler of Dubai. The message was simple: stop speaking to the media, drop the complaint at the United Nations, and stop talking to your lawyers, and you can keep your daughters. In fear for her life and for her children, she agreed. Handwritten letters setting out what was required of her were signed. She was given a home, a monthly allowance for her children paid by the Ruler's office, a car and a driver. The home was a villa across the road from the house in which Sheikha Latifa has been kept since her forced return to Dubai. From her window Ms Javadli could see the princess, followed everywhere by the Dubai authorities, while the same authorities watched her. Dubai Police ran the girls' visits to their father and brought them home to their mother afterwards. It was an uneasy peace, but it held: the arrangement operated, openly and with the police's full knowledge, for three years, even though a Dubai court had given custody to the father. Ms Javadli did everything that was demanded of her. She stayed silent.

On 27 September 2025, after a visit arranged and escorted by Dubai Police, Sheikh Saeed kept the girls and did not return them. When Ms Javadli took her daughters home from a court-ordered visit on 8 November 2025, she was accused of kidnapping them. In the early hours of 3 June 2026 around eighteen armed, masked officers of Dubai Police and Dubai State Security broke into her home. She was beaten, injected with drugs against her will and taken to a State Security facility, where she was held for six days without a lawyer, without access to her embassy and without being told where her children were. Her daughters were taken from their beds, screaming. She has not seen or spoken to them since.

Since her release Ms Javadli has been made homeless, locked out of the home the Ruler's office gave her, placed under a renewed travel ban, and charged with the kidnapping of her own children and with cybercrime offences for the online posts in which she asked the UN and the world for help. She and her 66-year-old mother went on trial for the kidnapping on 11 November 2026, at a hearing held behind closed doors that lasted a few minutes, at the end of which the judge reserved judgment to 18 November without calling the defence witnesses. On 18 November the same judge withdrew from the case, recording "a sense of embarrassment", the formula by which a judge in the UAE steps aside without giving reasons, and sent the file to the President of the Criminal Court for a new judge to be

assigned. No judgment has been given and no new date has been fixed. The one hour a week of video contact with her daughters that a Dubai court ordered in July never took place once, and has now been cancelled altogether. In the custody proceedings Sheikh Saeed told the court that Ms Javadli wanted to keep the girls from him to "instil Western behaviour that does not befit Muslims, citizens of the UAE, and members of the Ruling Family in particular".

A video message to the United Nations

Alongside the complaint, Ms Javadli has recorded a video message to the United Nations asking for its help. In it she says: "They told me: stay silent and you can keep your children. So I stayed silent, and for three years I did not say a word, while the abuse of me never stopped. Then they came in the night and they took my daughters anyway." She asks the UN to ask the UAE where her daughters are, to check on their safety, to arrange an urgent humanitarian visit to them, to reunite her with her daughters and the girls with their grandparents, and to press for a fair hearing, which she says she has no hope of receiving in Dubai "when you are up against the ruling family". Ms Javadli and Mr Haigh have also written three times, in October and November, to the UAE's candidate for Secretary-General of the United Nations, Lana Nusseibeh, asking for her help. They have not yet had a reply.

In her video message to the United Nations, Zeynab Javadli says:

> "I am speaking to the United Nations, to the Human Rights Council and to the world, to anyone who can help. Please act urgently. Save me. Save my daughters. Save my parents. I am terrified for our lives here in Dubai. In June this year, in the middle of the night, around eighteen armed men in black masks broke into my home. They beat me. They injected me with drugs. And they took my daughters out of their beds while they were screaming for me. My girls have lived with me every day of their lives. They will have been terrified. I was taken to State Security and held for six days, with no lawyer and no one to tell me where my children were. That was five months ago, and I have not seen my daughters since. I have not heard their voices. I do not know if they are well. I do not know who is holding them at night when they cry.
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> "They told me: stay silent and you can keep your children. So I stayed silent, and for three years I did not say a word, while the abuse of me never stopped. Then they came in the night and they took my daughters anyway. The last thing my girls saw was their mother beaten and drugged on the floor of our home. The last thing I heard was their screams. And now I fear for all our lives, and I am the one on trial, accused of kidnapping my own children, who have lived with me all their lives.
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> "I am asking the United Nations: please help me. Please ask the United Arab Emirates where my children are. Please check on their safety and their true wellbeing. Please arrange an urgent humanitarian visit to my daughters. Please reunite me with my children, and reunite them with their grandparents, the only real family they have known since they were born. I have no hope of ever receiving a fair hearing here in Dubai, not when you are up against the ruling family. Please ask them to give me a fair hearing."

Speaking in 2022, when the first complaint was filed, Rodney Dixon KC said:

> "Our application to the UN in Geneva is a cry for help on behalf of Ms Javadli and her young children before it is too late. There is still time for a constructive solution to be found to protect their fundamental rights and safety in accordance with international

human rights standards. There is no need for this situation to deteriorate any further. It can be ended now in the best interests of all parties."

Speaking today, Mr Dixon said:

"In 2022 we warned that there was no need for this situation to deteriorate any further. It has, however, now sadly deteriorated beyond anything we feared. As is set out in the communication to the UN and the supporting evidence, Ms Javadli has been beaten, drugged and detained by State Security, separated from her three young daughters, and is now prosecuted for being their mother. We are asking the United Nations to act urgently, before more harm is done to this family."

David Haigh, the international human rights lawyer who represented Princess Latifa and co-founded the Free Latifa campaign, who gave evidence in Princess Haya's case against Sheikh Mohammed in the High Court in London, and who has represented Ms Javadli since 2021, said:

"In 2022 Zeynab did what Dubai asked. She stopped speaking, she stopped pursuing her complaint at the United Nations, and in return she was allowed to keep her daughters. She trusted the word of the Ruler of Dubai. They put her in a house across the road from the one where Sheikha Latifa is held. She could see Latifa from her window, with the Dubai authorities following her every step, and the same people were watching Zeynab. It was an uneasy peace, but for three years Dubai Police ran that arrangement themselves. Then Dubai tore it up. Around eighteen armed, masked men and women came into her bedroom in the middle of the night, beat her and drugged her, and took her children. She woke up handcuffed in a wheelchair in a State Security facility, where she was forced to record a confession and, we believe, held in the same cell in which they kept Latifa, with the scrawled writing of earlier prisoners still on the walls. Then they charged her with kidnapping her own daughters. So she is going back to the United Nations, and this time she will not be silenced.

"Zeynab is a brave, courageous woman, a mother who simply wants to live a quiet and happy life with her three beautiful children, free from fear, harassment and intimidation. A simple joy that any parent should have, no matter who you are or where you live. She gave Dubai its chance. For three years she kept her side of the bargain, and Dubai did not keep its own. That is still all she asks. In March this year Dubai's Crown Prince, Sheikh Hamdan, told Dubai's Community Development Authority to stop calling mothers housewives and to call them Generation Shapers instead. That same authority has spent five months making sure this mother cannot see her children. What has been done to Zeynab is a disgrace to a state that tells the world it honours mothers and protects children.

"Lana Nusseibeh wants to run the United Nations. Zeynab has written to her and begged for her help, and the answer has been silence. She is a minister in a government that did this to a mother and her three little girls, and that has done the same to countless women and children before them. Zeynab's case gives her the chance to show the world that she will stand up for women and children, and against human rights abuse, even when that means standing up to the rulers of her own country. We hope and trust that she will take it."

David Haigh

ENDS

NOTES TO EDITORS

- **Filing:** the complaint was filed with the UN Special Procedures in Geneva on 18 November 2026 by Rodney Dixon KC.
- **The complaint:** the Further Urgent Communication to the UN Special Procedures runs to 23 pages, with 27 annexes in a bundle of 672 pages, including Ms Javadli's own recorded accounts of the raid, her detention and her interrogation, medical evidence, court documents and Dubai Police records. It is not being published. Mandate holders will receive it in full. Journalists with questions about its contents can put them to Mr Dixon.
- **The criminal case:** Dubai Court of First Instance, First Misdemeanours Circuit (Family), Case No. 21630/2026 Penal. The court record of the hearings of 11 and 18 November 2026 is before the UN; an English translation is available to journalists on request. Ms Javadli's former husband has joined the prosecution as civil claimant.
- **The video: Ms Javadli's video message to the United Nations is published at dubaiwatch.org/zeynab-javadli, in full and in a short version. Her earlier video appeal to Lana Nusseibeh (6 November 2026) is at dubaiwatch.org/zeynab-javadli-video-appeal-lana-nusseibeh. Full videos and stills are available for broadcast on request. Zeynab's own Instagram is @zeynabismyname and she is on X at @zeynabjavadli. More on the background to the case, the timeline and all press coverage: dubaiwatch.org/zeynab-javadli.**
- **The 2022 complaint** was filed on 6 October 2022 and reported by the BBC on 11 October 2022 ('Ex-wife of Dubai royal pleads for help from UN in child custody battle'). The arrangement that followed, under which the girls lived with their mother in a home provided by the Ruler's office with their visits to their father run by Dubai Police, is documented in Dubai Police status reports, Ruler's office payment vouchers and WhatsApp messages with named Dubai Police officers, all of which are before the UN and the Dubai court. Dubai Police and the Public Prosecution now deny that it existed.
- **Generation Shaper:** on Mother's Day, 21 March 2026, Sheikh Hamdan bin Mohammed Al Maktoum, Crown Prince of Dubai, directed the Community Development Authority to adopt the title 'Generation Shaper' in place of 'housewife' (Gulf Business, 22 March 2026). The CDA is the authority responsible for implementing the Dubai courts' contact orders in Ms Javadli's case.
- **"Western behaviour":** in his court filings in the 2025 custody proceedings Sheikh Saeed said Ms Javadli wanted to keep the children from him to 'instil Western behaviour that does not befit Muslims, citizens of the UAE, and members of the Ruling Family in particular' (Daily Mail, 10 April 2026, from the court papers; Daily Mail, 29 November 2025). The Arabic filing is before the UN.
- **The High Court findings:** Re Al M (Children) [2019] EWHC 3415 (Fam), published 5 March 2020, and the further judgments of 2021, Sir Andrew McFarlane, President of the Family Division: findings that Sheikh Mohammed ordered and orchestrated the abduction of Sheikha Shamsa (Cambridge, 2000) and Sheikha Latifa (2002 and 2018) and conducted a campaign of intimidation against Princess Haya, including, in 2021, the hacking of her telephone with Pegasus spyware.
- **Lana Nusseibeh** is the UAE Minister of State (on leave) and the UAE's candidate for Secretary-General of the United Nations. Ms Javadli and Mr Haigh wrote to her on 27 October 2026 and again on 3 November 2026. No reply has been received. Her candidacy is also under scrutiny over Sudan: on 28 October 2026 Human Rights Watch said she had repeatedly denied UN findings linking the UAE to the Rapid Support Forces. The UAE denies supporting the RSF.
- **Rodney Dixon KC** is a barrister at Temple Garden Chambers, London, and a leading international human rights and international criminal lawyer. He acts before the UN human rights bodies, the International Criminal Court and international courts and tribunals. He represented Sheikha Latifa bint Mohammed Al Maktoum, the daughter of the Ruler of Dubai, before the United

Nations: on 20 April 2021 UN human rights experts, including the Working Group on Enforced Disappearances and the Special Rapporteur on Torture, called on the UAE to release her immediately and to provide proof that she was alive. Ms Javadli's 2022 complaint was also filed by Mr Dixon.

- **Zeynab Javadli** was born in Baku in 1991. A rhythmic gymnast, she represented Azerbaijan internationally and won world championship medals with its group in 2007 and 2009. She married Sheikh Saeed in 2015; he divorced her in 2019. In September 2020 she livestreamed Dubai Police breaking into her home, which made headlines around the world. She is on X at @zeynabjavadli and on Instagram at @zeynabismyname.
- **David Haigh** is a British international human rights lawyer who has represented Ms Javadli since 2021. He was Sheikha Latifa's lawyer and co-founded the Free Latifa campaign, gave evidence in the High Court proceedings between Princess Haya and Sheikh Mohammed, and co-founded Dubai Watch (dubaiwatch.org), the UK-based watchdog that hosts the full case, timeline and press coverage at dubaiwatch.org/zeynab-javadli.

PREVIOUS COVERAGE

- **BBC News,** 5 June 2026: *Ex-wife of Dubai ruler's nephew in custody, prosecutors say.* https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cx2124zylxno
- **BBC News,** 4 June 2026: *Ex-wife of Dubai ruler's nephew missing, says lawyer.* https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c362618d9e8o
- **The Times,** 4 June 2026: *Ex-wife of Dubai prince detained amid custody battle.* https://www.thetimes.com/world/middle-east/article/ex-wife-dubai-prince-abducted-missing-zeynab-javadli-bbwtm0kf7
- **Daily Mail,** 4 June 2026: *Ex-wife of Dubai Prince and her three children 'abducted' after she celebrated custody battle win.* https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-15871643/
- **The Independent,** 5 June 2026: *Ex-wife of Dubai ruler's nephew arrested amid abduction allegation.* https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/zeynab-javadli-dubai-ruler-nephew-custody-b2990237.html
- **Der Spiegel,** 7 June 2026: *Ex-Sportlerin Zeynab Javadli nach Sorgerechtsstreit gegen Kaution entlassen.* https://www.spiegel.de/ausland/dubai-zeynab-javadli-wird-nach-sorgerechtsstreit-mit-scheich-festgehalten-a-cf60e750-eda7-4634-9f3b-6ed20ae9cd78
- **AFP (via The New Arab),** 8 June 2026: *Ex-wife of UAE royal released on bail in custody dispute.* https://www.newarab.com/news/ex-wife-uae-royal-released-bail-custody-dispute
- **Daily Mail,** 10 April 2026: *Dubai royal's ex-wife sobs as she reveals he's won custody battle over their three daughters.* https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-15716141/Dubai-royals-ex-wife-sobs-custody-battle.html
- **Der Spiegel,** 4 December 2025: *Sorgerechtsstreit im Herrscherhaus von Dubai: Retten Sie mich und meine Kinder!.* https://www.spiegel.de/ausland/sorgerechtsstreit-im-herrscherhaus-von-dubai-retten-sie-mich-und-meine-kinder-a-b0e0e1bf-1c93-4d34-9d87-cf9d59adb452
- **BBC News,** 25 November 2025: *Ex-wife of Dubai royal says she fears arrest as custody battle escalates.* https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cj01j710rmmo
- **BBC News,** 11 October 2022: *Ex-wife of Dubai royal pleads for help from UN in child custody battle.* https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-63200654
- **Daily Mail,** 11 October 2022: *Ex-wife of Dubai sheikh begs for help: 'We are hostages in our home'.* https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-11302907/Ex-wife-Dubai-sheikh-begs-help-hostages-home.html
- **Daily Mail,** 10 September 2020: *Estranged wife of Dubai royal pleads for help saying officials are trying to 'snatch her children'.* https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-8719839/Estranged-wife-Dubai-royal-pleads-help-saying-officials-trying-snatch-children.html

The full list of more than thirty articles, newest first, is at dubaiwatch.org/zeynab-javadli#in-the-news.

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