

STATEMENT BY DAVID HAIGH REGARDING RADHA STIRLING, SHAHID BOLSEN AND DETAINED IN DUBAI

London, 23 May 2020 – David Haigh, the human rights lawyer, victim of torture in the UAE, and former managing director of Leeds United FC, who was a leading light in the campaign organisation ‘Detained in Dubai’ from 2016 to 2018, is issuing the following statement with regard to allegations made by Radha Stirling, with whom he campaigned to release several high-profile detainees in the Gulf state:

When I was released from 22 months of arbitrary detention in a Dubai jail in March 2016, my aim was to provide advocacy services for those who, like me, found themselves on the wrong end of rough justice in the Gulf and lacked the support they so desperately needed. I could have set up my own organisation, but instead teamed up with Radha Stirling, who already ran a small ‘operation’ under the name ‘Detained in Dubai’. For a couple of years, we worked together on this and also established a company together ‘Stirling Haigh’, but then agreed to part company after I (not Ms Stirling as she claims) resigned in December 2018 (see attached resignation letter p9-11).

From that point, Ms Stirling has made a string of allegations against me and those who supported me and has said she represents clients and helped other victims of injustice she has no authority to claim to represent or otherwise didn’t assist. For a long time I have turned a deaf ear to such statements; even though they were unfair and some were both hurtful and damaging, I felt it would look a little undignified and self-absorbed for two campaigners fighting a brutal regime to be fighting each other (and at that point I still felt there was a slim chance Ms Stirling was genuinely interested in advancing the cause of human rights in the Gulf, rather than fees or fame). However, an avalanche of social media posts (many late at night and many from fake troll social media accounts Ms Stirling set up or controls), and her so called “press releases” pushed matters to the point where a dignified silence is no longer sustainable, and I therefore feel the need to clarify a few issues.

Legal action against Ms Radha Stirling and Detained in Dubai.

There is a limit to how much detail I can give in this statement, because I began legal action against Radha Stirling at the start of the year, as have other parties, for defamation and harassment, as well as for serious breaches of data protection legislation. Ms Stirling has been aware of this for many months, just as she was aware that I commenced an employment dispute with ACAS in 2019 (with whom she refused to cooperate). I, and others, have also filed a complaint with the Metropolitan Police, accusing Ms Stirling of harassment, intimidation, and of cybercrime in relation to her attempts to hack and damage our websites and social media, including the Free Latifa website, and social media which she tried to and did hack (see attached evidence including WhatsApp and Facebook messages from Ms Stirling (p12-21)). Both cases are being handled by the leading litigation firm Rosenblatt.

Why I resigned from any association with Radha Stirling and Detained in Dubai.

The reasons for Ms Stirling and me parting company in 2018 are extensive but centre on a fundamental disagreement between us on what sort of campaigning entity we wanted to run. I believe that justice and protection of human rights in the UAE, and elsewhere in the Gulf,

should be provided on the basis of need, not on who can pay or attract a good story. I wanted Detained in Dubai to be a genuine not-for-profit NGO, not a for-profit company with a sole shareholder (Ms Stirling). I was also concerned about Ms Stirling's tendency to use high-profile cases to gain free publicity, referring to herself as a lawyer, when the reality I discovered was that she isn't a lawyer, didn't go to any law school, and didn't even graduate with a law degree. Detained in Dubai, employs no professionally qualified staff, has no office, and even no insurance. I then discovered that, rather than file accounts to explain her profits from her claimed '10,000 clients in 10 years' (a number that is frankly impossible), Ms Stirling sees her Detained in Dubai company compulsorily dissolved each time for failure to comply with English law and file accounts; she then sets up a new company with an identical name but new number, as any check of Companies House will show.

Since parting company with her (and dissolving the firm Stirling Haigh which we ran together), I have run the campaign to free Sheikha Latifa Al Maktoum together with Tiina Jauhiainen and Latifa's own family, including her cousin Marcus Essabri, and I also established 'Detained International', a campaigning and advocacy group which has taken on some of the pro bono Dubai cases but also looks further afield in helping people wrongly detained by regimes that deny justice. Detained International is the organisation I urged Ms Stirling to turn Detained in Dubai into: qualified professionals providing universal pro bono assistance regardless of ability to pay and interest to the media.

There the matter ought to have rested, with her ploughing her furrow with what was left of Detained in Dubai, and me ploughing mine with Detained International. However, Ms Stirling's increasingly erratic and abusive behaviour has meant a peaceful coexistence has never been possible, and has now reached into the realms of defamation, intimidation, harassment and cybercrime. Her behaviour has included numerous breaches of confidentiality and a tendency to get into 'states' where her actions are inappropriate, and a zeal to promote herself that has led her to issue press releases regardless of whether it was the truth or in the victim's interest or not. In addition, her professional and ethical choices, and the associates she surrounds herself with, both privately and professionally, are increasingly undermining the chances of getting justice for those we are campaigning for.

Princess Latifa

Ms Stirling's increasing habit of jumping on the media bandwagon from her home in Spain at every opportunity, irrelevant of client interest, when real NGOs and lawyers secured successes on behalf of detainees, has forced my rift with her out into the open. An example of this bandwagon-jumping is the high-profile case of Sheikha Latifa Al Maktoum, the daughter of Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum of Dubai, whose escape attempt from her restricted life in the Dubai royal family was thwarted by Emirati and Indian troops in March 2018. Princess Latifa has made it clear – in writing – that only Tiina Jauhiainen and I are authorised to act for her, she did this by powers of attorney that have been accepted by the barrister Toby Cadman (p5-8), the United Nations as well as leading English QCs and solicitors, and of course Latifa's own family (whom Radha Stirling also abuses and harasses p33). Indeed, in the High Court custody case of Latifa's stepmother, the Judgment of the honourable Sir Andrew McFarlane names myself (section 110) as the person Latifa reached out to for help and to release her video, along with Tiina Jauhiainen; Ms Stirling isn't even mentioned. Therefore, any claim that Radha Stirling or anyone else makes to be speaking on behalf of Latifa is by definition false, but of course for Radha Stirling there is free advertising to be had. Last year, in a characteristic attempt at a blaze of publicity, Ms Stirling appointed a

barrister to seemingly work in relation to Latifa – Latifa’s already long appointed legal team of Alun Jones QC and Rodney Dixon QC had to inform this barrister that Ms Stirling had no right to appoint him, and thus he had no right to speak on Latifa’s behalf (he subsequently stepped away). Worse than this was in Spring 2019, When after a considerable effort myself and Tiina managed retained the services of leading American Lawyer Lisa Bloom to act on behalf of Latifa. That was until Radha Stirling and her trolls commenced the harassment abuse and lies and Lisa Bloom walked away. Despite this clear situation, Ms Stirling continues to claim to represent Latifa (whenever there is an opportunity for press attention or advertising for Ms Stirling), despite having undertaken no work on the case since at least December 2018, other than press releases promoting herself whenever the case is in the news.

Shahid Bolsen – Partner in Detained in Dubai and of Radha Stirling – and LGBTQ hate and discrimination

Another factor in this sad business is that articles have appeared written by Ms Stirling’s partner and Detained in Dubai staff member, Shahid Bolsen (p22-23), which have peddled hate, misinformation and absurd arguments against the LGBT+ community as well as victims of HIV (p30-32) and rape. Mr Bolsen is a convicted murderer and highly controversial figure who espouses extreme views that seemingly back the use of terrorism, yet he remains a leading light in the Detained in Dubai campaign; he previously ran an internet café and was a personal boxing trainer (please see this Foreign Policy article on Mr Bolsen (<https://foreignpolicy.com/2015/02/27/allah-versus-kfc-egypt-arab-spring-terrorism>) (p24-29). As I was the first openly gay managing director and chairman of a top English football club, an advocate of equality, and having been publicly credited with paving the way for gay football managers and players to come out safely, it was clearly impossible for me to work alongside Mr Bolsen (and others who find his views acceptable), or even be associated with them. Despite requests from me for Ms Stirling to disassociate Detained in Dubai from Mr Bolsen’s published views, along with advice from the eminent lawyer Toby Cadman that association with such views was undermining the interests of the victims of injustice we were campaigning for, including Princess Latifa, Ms Stirling refused to dismiss or even discipline Mr Bolsen, indeed she appears to think there is little wrong with his views. Another of her ‘staff’ is a former Spanish timeshare salesman, Barry Ley, who claims to live in Geneva but in fact lives in Spain like Ms Stirling, running troll twitter accounts for Ms Stirling (p34-35). Mr Bolsen, who enjoys the title ‘Head of client relations, Detained in Dubai’, wrote a self-published book called ‘Blaggers’; according to amazon.co.uk, it claims to detail Mr Ley’s experiences with ‘side-splitting anecdotes of sales tactics to hair-raising tales of extortion and organised crime’.

Given my overt business links with Ms Stirling, and the fact that it is widely known that I was working with her within Detained in Dubai, I felt then, and even more so now, that I have no option but to state publicly that I no longer have any involvement with her or Detained in Dubai.

The final straw came in a never-ending string of recent social media posts by Ms Stirling, which included the words ‘Fraud alert’ in capital letters and included her referring to me as a ‘suspended solicitor’ and ‘dodgy David Haigh’ and before that having been “struck off”. The post has since been taken down, but we have a screenshot of it, and it forms part of the case against her for defamation. For the record, I have never been suspended as a solicitor or struck off (as a simple search of the regulator will reveal), and can only conclude that the allegation arises out of pure spite. Ms Stirling’s behaviour continued this week when an English court

confirmed it had to enforce a foreign financial judgment against me from a Dubai court, a judgment that's under appeal in Dubai and now stayed in England pending appeal. The judgment was from a Dubai Court hearing I was not permitted to attend, held whilst I was in hospital, and in circumstances set against a background of torture and abuse. Until I resigned in 2018, Ms Stirling had always claimed to believe in innocence before a proof of guilt, and backed my legal cases, as any true campaigner against injustice would. Since my resignation, and perhaps fearful of the establishment of a competitor, Ms Stirling has spent the last two years harassing and abusing me, including teaming up with parties in Dubai to promote any adverse findings in Dubai courts against me – and this is a state whose 'justice systems' she claims to campaign against because they are universally flawed, but of course with the exception now of my case.

I sincerely regret that relations between me and Radha Stirling broke down, especially given the time and resources I invested between 2016 and 2018 in our joint projects after I was released from my two years of hell in Dubai. I tried everything I could to work with her, even to the point of discussing with her what training she might need to allow her to campaign effectively and what treatment may assist her. I also tried to reach an amicable parting with her that would keep the reasons behind my departure from Detained in Dubai quiet; one of those agreements, in writing, is that I would continue with the Free Latifa campaign and she would not, but it is clear that those agreements have never been respected and the willingness/ability on her side is lacking. As her unjustified accusations against me and the campaigns I run continue unabated, I have had no choice but to escalate legal actions and issue this statement.

In the end it boiled down to the fact that I wanted to help victims of injustice in Dubai, regardless of their ability to gain media interest or pay. Ms Stirling sole income, it appears, is based on her receiving money or media attention from those victims.

End

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Attached:

1. Resignation Letter of Toby Cadman Barrister – dated 26 June 2019 (p5-8)
2. WhatsApp of Radha Stirling noting David Haigh first resignation - 8 December 2018 (p6)
3. Resignation letter of David Haigh (second resignation) – 18 December 2018 (p10-11)
4. Evidence of Ms Stirling attempting to and hacking internet accounts including social media (p12)
5. WhatsApp message of Radha Stirling "I want to delete FreeLatifa campaign on Twitter" (p13)
6. WhatsApp message of Radha Stirling falsely claiming Latifa's Cousin Marcus Essabri (formerly Fatima Essabri) was "made up". (p14)
7. WhatsApp messages of Radha Stirling evidencing hacking of FreeLatifa (p15-21)
8. Evidence showing Shahid Bolsen works at Detained in Dubai as a "Legal Consultant" (p22-23)
9. Foreign policy article on Shahid Bolsen (p24-29)
10. LGBT Hate article written by Shahid Bolsen (p30-31)
11. WhatsApp message of Radha Stirling re trolling and discussing her troll accounts and (p32-38) "attaching" Latifa's legal team Rodney Dixon QC on twitter