

American arrested in Dubai in April for mocking youth culture with video about Arab 'gangstas' is still in jail as court waits for translation of spoof video

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<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2514765/American-arrested-Dubai-mocking-youth-culture-video-Arab-gangstas.html>

A Minnesota man is being held in an Arab jail after putting a spoof video about youth culture in Dubai online.

Shezanne Cassim, 29, was arrested in April and charged with violating a 2012 cyber crime law that has penalties for allegedly challenging authorities, his attorney, Susan Burns, said.

Mr Cassim, who was moved to a maximum security prison in Abu Dhabi in June, has been accused of endangering national security.

He is the first foreigner arrested under tougher measures governing internet use in the United Arab Emirates, according to the Emirates Center for Human Rights.

Mr Cassim entered a not guilty plea in court, and made a statement about his involvement in the [video](#), which he created and posted online last year, his brother, Shervon said.

Several other people who featured in the video have also been held in jail, alongside Mr Cassim, who was born in Sri Lanka before becoming an American citizen.

The 29-year-old, who has a degree in political science, moved to Dubai after graduating in 2006 and worked at Emirates Airline before taking a job earlier this year as a business consultant at PricewaterhouseCoopers.

His family was initially told a verdict would be issued on October 28,

but the verdict has been postponed five times, most recently because a judge was waiting for an Arabic translation of the video.

'In all this time, they have refused to grant bail, with no explanation given,' Shervon Cassim said. His brother's next court date is December 16.

United Arab Emirates authorities did not return messages seeking comment from Associated Press. The U.S. Embassy had no comment.

A message left with the U.S. State Department was not returned, and Mr Cassim's attorney in Dubai said in an email he had no comment.

The U.S. government cannot force a foreign leadership to release American inmates but it can demand immediate access to them.

Members of Minnesota's congressional delegation, including Senators Amy Klobuchar and Al Franken, have tried to intervene, pressing the United Arab Emirates' U.S. ambassador for answers, according to the [Star Tribune](#).

Mike Davies, director of global public relations for PricewaterhouseCoopers, said the company was looking into the matter.

The case reflects a wider crackdown by Gulf Arab authorities on social media use. In the past two years, dozens of people have been arrested for Twitter posts deemed offensive to leaders or for social media campaigns urging more political openness.

Ms Burns said the video was posted on YouTube in October 2012, about a month before the cybercrimes law was enacted in the United Arab Emirates.

She said her understanding of the law was that it included penalties of temporary imprisonment and a fine up to nearly \$250,000.

The video, called Satwa Combat School, is set in the Satwa district of Dubai. The family said in a statement that the parody pokes fun at Dubai teenagers who called themselves 'gangstas', but were known for mild behavior.

The video shows fictional combat training, including throwing a sandal and using a cellphone to call for help. It opens with text saying the video is fictional and is not meant to offend.

'It's tragic. It's something that can happen to anybody, especially young people who post all the time on YouTube,' Ms Burns said.

'To be incarcerated over something that's clearly a joke, clearly meant in jest, clearly meant in good humor - and held for seven months - is a violation of human rights.'

Shervon Cassim, who spent two months in Dubai trying to help his brother, said the family wants authorities there to 'realize that this is not worth their time and just release him'.

'At a time when the United Arab Emirates is holding itself out as a modern country, it is sadly ironic and a poor image to present to the world that it continues to imprison my brother for uploading a silly video,' he said.