PRESS RELEASE

From international human rights lawyer David Haigh

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE · 6 November 2026

MOTHER OF DUBAI ROYAL'S CHILDREN MAKES VIDEO PLEA TO UAE'S UN SECRETARY-GENERAL CANDIDATE

- **Former world championship rhythmic gymnast Zeynab Javadli has not seen her three young daughters since armed, masked officers raided her home in the middle of the night on 2 June 2026**
- **Zeynab was beaten and drugged as her screaming girls were taken from their beds by armed officers of Dubai Police and Dubai State Security. She now faces criminal proceedings in Dubai, accused of kidnapping her own children**
- **Her two-minute video appeal to Lana Nusseibeh, the UAE minister whose bid to be the next UN Secretary-General is already under fire over Sudan, is released after letters to the minister went unanswered**

WATCH THE VIDEO: dubaiwatch.org/zeynab-javadli-video-appeal-lana-nusseibeh

LONDON, 6 November 2026: The mother of a Dubai royal's three young daughters has begged the woman bidding to become the world's most senior diplomat to help her get her children back, in an emotional video released today by international human rights lawyer David Haigh, who represents her.

Zeynab Javadli, the former wife of Sheikh Saeed bin Maktoum bin Rashid Al Maktoum, a nephew of Dubai's ruler, speaks directly to Her Excellency Lana Nusseibeh "as a daughter, as a woman, and as a minister of the country where my children are". She describes the night her home was attacked by armed men in black with their faces covered, how she was beaten and drugged, and how her daughters were taken from their beds, screaming and crying. "I haven't seen them since," she says.

Zeynab, who won world championship bronze medals for Azerbaijan as a member of its rhythmic gymnastics team in 2007 and 2009, was released on police bail on 8 June 2026. She has been accused of kidnapping her own children, who had lived with her all their lives, and of cybercrime for the online posts in which she asked the world for help, and she now faces criminal proceedings in Dubai. She is held in Dubai under a travel ban. In July the Dubai Execution Court ordered weekly supervised video calls with her daughters; not one has taken place.

On 27 October 2026 Zeynab and Mr Haigh each wrote privately to Ms Nusseibeh, who is on leave as Minister of State while she campaigns to lead the United Nations. On 3 November Mr Haigh wrote to her again, enclosing both letters. None of the three letters has received a reply. The two letters of 27 October, one from Zeynab and one from Mr Haigh, are published today with personal details removed.

Zeynab asks Ms Nusseibeh for three things: that her daughters be returned to her; that the accusations against her be properly heard or closed; and that the travel ban on her mother be lifted so that she can go to Zeynab's father, who is seriously ill in Azerbaijan.

In her letter of 27 October, Zeynab reminded Ms Nusseibeh that Eleanor Roosevelt, who chaired the drafting of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 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," she wrote.

"Please, Ms Nusseibeh, show the world that if you were to lead the United Nations you would truly stand up for human rights," Zeynab says in the video.

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In his letter of 27 October, Mr Haigh told Ms Nusseibeh that Zeynab 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". He wrote: "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."

Ms Nusseibeh's candidacy is already under scrutiny over Sudan. On 28 October Human Rights Watch said that as a UAE minister she had repeatedly denied UN findings linking the UAE to the Rapid Support Forces, the paramilitary group accused of mass atrocities in Sudan's civil war. Sudan's mission to the United Nations has questioned her "independence, impartiality and credibility". The UAE denies supporting the RSF.

Speaking today, Mr Haigh said:

> "Zeynab has not seen her three little girls since the night in June when her home in Dubai was stormed by around eighteen armed men from Dubai Police and Dubai State Security. She was drugged and taken to State Security, and she has not seen her children since. Now she is accused of kidnapping the daughters who have lived with her all their lives. She is not asking for favours. She is asking to see her children, and for a fair hearing.
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> "I have been Zeynab's lawyer and her friend for five years, and I have been with her every step of the way. I know what happened that night, and I know what came before it. I hold five years of evidence of the horrific abuse that she and her daughters have suffered at the hands of people in Dubai: documents, recordings and Zeynab's own video diaries.
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> "Ms Nusseibeh wants to lead the United Nations, the body charged with protecting human rights around the world. Here is a mother in her own country begging for her help, and so far the only answer has been silence.
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> "One phone call from Ms Nusseibeh could reunite these children with their mother. What is being done to Zeynab in Dubai is unfair, unjust and a clear abuse of her human rights. If Ms Nusseibeh will not make that call for Zeynab, the world is entitled to ask whether, as Secretary-General, she would ever stand up to human rights abuses, in her own country, the UAE, or anywhere else."

David Haigh

ENDS

NOTES TO EDITORS

- **The video and the letters** are published on Dubai Watch: dubaiwatch.org/zeynab-javadli-video-appeal-lana-nusseibeh. The full case, timeline and all press coverage so far: dubaiwatch.org/zeynab-javadli.
- **The letters:** the two letters of 27 October 2026, from Zeynab and from David Haigh, are attached to this release (personal details removed) and are online at dubaiwatch.org/assets/letters-to-lana-nusseibeh-27-oct-2026.pdf.
- **Consent:** Zeynab Javadli recorded the video herself in early November 2026 and has consented to its release.
- **For broadcast:** the full two-minute video and stills are available on request. Zeynab may be available for interview, subject to her safety; requests through David Haigh.
- **Background:** In 2022 Zeynab complained to the United Nations, through the Human Rights Council's Special Procedures in Geneva. After that complaint, an arrangement approved by Dubai's ruler, Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, let her daughters live with her, in a home provided by the ruler's office, with their visits to their father run by Dubai Police. It held for three years. Dubai Police and the Public Prosecution now deny that it existed.
- **Sudan:** Human Rights Watch, 'UAE: UN Secretary-General Candidate Whitewashed Abuses', 28 October 2026 (hrw.org); Middle East Eye, 'Sudan decries Nusseibeh UN candidacy as whitewashing Emirati role in civil war', 26 October 2026. The UAE has repeatedly denied providing support to the RSF.

- **Lana Nusseibeh** is the UAE Minister of State (on leave) and the UAE's candidate for Secretary-General of the United Nations. She can be contacted at info@lananusseibeh.org, or through the Permanent Mission of the United Arab Emirates to the United Nations, NYUNPRM@mofaic.gov.ae.
- **Zeynab Javadli** is on X at @zeynabjavadli and on Instagram at @zeynabismyname.
- **David Haigh** is a British international human rights lawyer who represents Zeynab Javadli. He advised Sheikha Latifa bint Mohammed Al Maktoum and co-founded the Free Latifa campaign.
- **Dubai Watch** (dubaiwatch.org) is a UK-based human rights watchdog that alerts, informs and advises on the risks of travelling to, living in and doing business in Dubai and the wider UAE. It hosts the video, the letters and the full case.

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
- **The Sun,** 4 June 2026: *Ex-wife of Dubai prince and three children 'abducted in horror night raid' amid explosive custody battle.* https://www.thesun.co.uk/news/39303808/dubai-prince-wife-children-abducted-custody-battle/
- **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
- **Daily Mail,** 29 November 2025: *Dubai royal's ex-wife begs for help as ex-husband wins custody of their daughters.* https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-15337525/Dubai-royals-ex-wife-begs-help-custody-daughters-Islamic-western-behaviour.html
- **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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