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DUBAI PUBLIC DEFENDER  
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## DUBAI PUBLIC DEFENDER OFFERS PRO BONO COUNSEL TO TOURISTS, RESIDENTS AND CITIZENS

### UAE ACTIVIST: FROM CRIMINAL DEFENDANT TO PUBLIC DEFENDER

Dubai, United Arab Emirates - After enduring more than four harrowing months as a criminal defendant herself, Dubai native and UAE community activist Safi Roshdy established a platform this month with the goal of providing pro bono assistance to criminal defendants in the Emirate.

“It can be overwhelming when you cannot afford legal advice, especially if you do not speak the language in which law is being practiced, and if you are not sure of the manner in which criminal proceedings take place,” affirmed Roshdy.

“Dubai Public Defender is a platform meant, at the very least, to provide basic resources to anyone seeking information on how to navigate legal criminal proceedings in Dubai, and the aim is to make pro bono legal counsel accessible in the city,” she clarified.

Roshdy had to represent herself in court and write her own court memos after Dubai Public Prosecution indicted her with the charge of “insulting using an information network or information technology means” last January, on account of an online post made in February 2022 on the Instagram account of the environmental and social initiative she had founded in the United Arab Emirates in 2017.

“I am privileged in that I have a basic grasp of the Arabic language, and could afford to put in the time to research and study the UAE legal articles related to the charge brought against me,” she said, explaining that she “only formally studied the UAE Ministry of Education’s Arabic language curriculum until the sixth grade” and has no formal legal education.

Roshdy, who was acquitted first by the Dubai Court of First Instance and then last month by the Dubai Court of Appeal, said: “The experience offered me insight into how the Dubai legal system can be abused, and how innocent individuals, who cannot afford legal counsel, can be bullied into acquiescing to an accuser's demands in order to avoid adverse sentencing.”

The misdemeanor with which Roshdy was charged carried a minimum fine of AED250,000 or around \$68,000 and a maximum fine of AED500,000 or around \$136,000.

In the UAE, if the defendants did not appoint any lawyers themselves, only those accused of felonies punishable by a death sentence or life imprisonment can be provided by the court with lawyers, whose fees would be covered by the state, at the trial stage. Those accused of felonies punishable by provisional imprisonment may also ask the court to provide them with an attorney if they are not able to afford one.\*

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Roshdy, an Egyptian American who was in the United States when a complaint was filed against her with Dubai Police, was detained for questioning on arrival at Dubai Airport in November 2023 and faced a prison sentence or deportation from the country of her birth.

“The mere processing of a criminal complaint by Dubai Police can result in a travel ban imposed on the accused,” said Roshdy. “I believe that the ease with which criminal charges can be brought forward against tourists, residents, and citizens in Dubai, should be counterbalanced by ease of access to critical legal advice.”

It is worth noting that the UAE Ministry of Justice, Dubai Courts, Dubai Legal Affairs Department, and the Dubai Community Development Authority all have publicized attempts to make pro bono legal counsel available, but none of the services seem to be accessible.

“I am not re-inventing the wheel with this initiative, just offering a service which can mean the world to some people, disseminating important information about legal proceedings, and working to make pro bono legal representation happen in Dubai,” said Roshdy.

#### About DUBAI PUBLIC DEFENDER:

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Website: [dubaipublicdefender.com](http://dubaipublicdefender.com)

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#### References:

\*<https://u.ae/en/information-and-services/justice-safety-and-the-law/litigation-procedures/criminal-cases->

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Photo:



Safi Roshdy, Founder of Dubai Public Defender

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