

Tabloids and Media Disinfo: Swedish Woman Detained in Dubai - Don't Believe Everything You Read

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Region: [Europe](#), [Middle East & North Africa](#)

Theme: [Media Disinformation](#)

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The media coverage in the Western press went into fever pitch over this story, but no Western journalist actually investigated the story and reported it. Not one. It all emanated from a press release.

Woman arrested with daughter in Dubai over drinking wine is released [gloated](#) the Guardian's headline. This story was written by one of their journalists and 'agencies.' In other words, The Guardian didn't do anything except hash together their version of a press release without declaring who the 'agency' was. And they certainly didn't check the facts.

The day earlier The Guardian [reported](#) **Woman held in Dubai with daughter after drinking wine on flight** and that the Swedish dentist says she was detained and had her passport confiscated after having one glass of wine after it was offered by the airline's own cabin crew.

The mainstream press dutifully followed – its a great story. Blonde, attractive Western woman unjustly arrested with her little daughter, locked up in harsh stinking conditions having been entrapped for having had a single glass of wine – how typical of those dastardly Arabs. The Telegraph, The Star, et al went off on one, became delirious as the story – one designed for click-baiting by a click-baiter, reached its summit of hysteria by quoting the distressed detainee: *“My daughter is a happy, smiley girl, but now she was terrified.”*

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Mother 'held in Dubai for three days after one glass of wine on flight'



Perhaps **Ellie Holman**, 44, who arrived on an Emirates flight from London Gatwick on July 13 should have checked her passport which had expired 3 days earlier. One has to question why did the officials at Gatwick did not notice or that the computerised check-in system failed.

Missing from all these MSM reports is the fact that Ms Holman was, in fact, also curiously carrying an Iranian passport. When she produced that, the official at Dubai airport, quite rightly pointed out that she needed to pay for a short 96-hour visa as she had not got one. Many countries use these short visas to allow for transfer times in the airport and short breaks for long-haul flights. Ms Holman had neither a valid passport nor a visa. She was not legally allowed entry. The official offered a way out. Ms Holman got angry because her planned 5-day visit had to be shortened in order to comply with the rules.

According to a statement issued by the airport, Ms Holman “refused angrily to the additional payment fees that the process would require and proceeded to verbally insult the immigration officer and take photos of the officer via her phone”.

Again, it should be pointed out that in most airports people are not allowed to take photos at border control, border crossings or check-in areas for security reasons. These rules exist in all British airports for instance. In Britain, Holman would have been sent straight back to the country of origin at the expense of the airline.

It should also be pointed out that it is against the law to be publicly abusive in the UAE.

Anyone who has lived and worked in the UAE knows this is the one thing that residents really do like. There is almost no such things as violence, thuggery, theft, drunkenness, swearing in public or vandalism - because the penalty is a few weeks in prison and deportation.

Ms Holman initially told the British media that her detention related to having a glass of wine on her flight to Dubai, which is not an offence nor a reason for her detention. And it never has been. People arriving in Dubai or Abu Dhabi will not be arrested for having a drink on an inbound flight. If you are visibly drunk and abusive at an airport, then maybe you'll be arrested. But then you would be anywhere in the world.

Two other parts to this story are wrong as well.

The Telegraph, for instance, said:

"A mother was detained in Dubai for three days with her four-year-old daughter after a drinking a complimentary glass of wine on a flight from London."

Holman was not detained for three days. She was apparently detained for less than 24 hours and then allowed to stay with friends whilst the authorities sorted out Holman's situation.

The paper claimed Holman was made to clean toilets and then claimed they were denied access to toilets and that she didn't realise it was illegal to drink alcohol heading to Dubai. None of these claims seem to be true. It is not illegal for Westerners to drink alcohol in Dubai.

Holman said that after three days in a hellhole prison:

"By now, Gary (her partner) knew something was wrong and had flown to Dubai to look for me. Friends had found out I was in jail and tried to visit. Nobody was allowed to see us."

Dubai's attorney general refuted claims that Ms Holman was not looked after and said:

"The woman and her child remained together in the airport security office for less than 24 hours while services were provided to them, taking into full account and consideration of her four-year-old daughter."

You may choose not to believe that - after all - the Dubai authorities would say that.

However, one should not be confused with the central character in this case - that of 'Detained in Dubai.' Whilst not disputing that this organisation has indeed assisted some Westerners to get out of trouble - in this case, they are misleading the public.

Detained in Dubai (DID) are described in all of the MSM as an NGO or 'non-governmental-organisation. An NGO is [officially](#) defined as: **a non-profit organization** that operates independently of any government, typically one whose purpose is to address a social or political issue. Not a single journalist has checked this fact out.

Just to start, DID are located in London. They are registered as a [limited company](#). It was incorporated only in March – 2018.

In 2017, Detained in Dubai was dissolved via a compulsory strike-off. The strike-off is a notice of intent to strike the company name off the Companies House register. This may be because the company has been dissolved. However, a compulsory strike-off action was threatened by Companies House and then discontinued in both 2016 and in 2015. There could very well be legitimate reasons for this, we do not know.

The listed director is Rahda Stirling who owns all the shares in the company and there are no other significant persons listed. Stirling's listed occupation is not 'solicitor' or 'lawyer' but only as 'MD'. The overview of the company activities is described as "Other professional, scientific and technical activities not elsewhere classified."

They are [not a registered charity](#) in the UK. They are [not registered](#) on the NGO sector website. They are [not registered as an NGO](#) based in the United Kingdom.

Stirling, born in Florida, America is described by Wikipedia as having attended Australia's Bond Law School. This is inaccurate. The university, which was only granted that status in 1989 is called simply [Bond University](#). It, like many, does not specialise particularly in law as a subject and we cannot find Rahda Stirling as having achieved any academic qualifications in the subject of law. That does not say she has none, just that we have not dug deep enough yet to find any.

The Solicitors Regulation Authority in Britain does not list Stirling as a qualified practising member of the law community.

One of DID's partners, **David Haigh** is described on their own website as "one of the most high profile human rights lawyers focusing on the Middle East today" – does not actually have a certificate to practise law in the UK. According to one [report](#):

"He has not got a practising certificate at this time and has not had one since 2014, which means he cannot act as a solicitor carrying out any of the six reserved legal activities." the Solicitors Regulation Authority (SRA) spokesman said.

"We know that he has spent time in prison because we gather information on the regulated community. When an application is made we assess all admissible evidence, but obviously we cannot speculate what his intentions might be in the future."

There is an interesting story [HERE](#) about Haigh, who was himself deported from the UAE for embezzlement, amongst other things. How true they are, is for you to decide as they were published in the press in the UAE.

Another partner in the firm is **Shahid Bolsen**, also not legally qualified from what we can ascertain, has a background in political science, economics, and journalism and "plays a key role in managing the mainstream and social media campaigns for Detained in Dubai" – according to the DID website.

It is important to note that the Swedish dentist, living in Britain, with an out of date EU passport but with an in-date Iranian passport and no visa – took her partner's surname as if

married – is not actually married. You can imagine any border control official anywhere in the world being somewhat suspicious of an individual presenting themselves as such. And let's not forget, to complicate matters, the UAE is not friends with Iran – quite the opposite.

It is also important to note that Ellie Holman has complained publicly that the cost of her three-day detainment in Dubai was around £30,000. In fact, she describes this as all of her and her 'husbands' savings. No other firm has been referenced in this story and only Detained in Dubai has been named as representing her, one can only assume where their savings went.

Detained in Dubai actively state on their website that:

“We assist with case strategy, press, negotiating the legal system in the UAE and whatever it takes to achieve a positive outcome for you.”

Finally, we are not defaming the work of Detained in Dubai – and quite sure it does good work. But it is not an NGO as we have been misled to believe, is a for-profit limited company, not a charity and does not provide legal services because it, nor the people who work there are not qualified to do so.

This story was probably created in order to stir up a media frenzy to put pressure on the authorities in Dubai when it probably wasn't required in the first place – for money. Many of the claims made by the MSM in this story are indeed, not true at all.

Here are some readers responses (screenshots) from the [Independent](#) who also reported the story. There were at the time only 19 responses, several were angry at the quality of reporting:

Aki123

59 minutes ago

First of all she was detained for traveling with an expired passport, abusing the security and recording in a secure airport area which is against the law in just about any country. I have lived in dubai for 5 years and have never heard of anyone getting arrested for drinking a glass. Honestly, wouldn't hurt to do some fact checking before writing such nonsense.

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dearsina

52 minutes ago

I'm so disappointed in all the British papers who didn't bother asking the simplest questions. For instance. Why would the UAE question the visa of someone from Europe.. They don't need a visa.. Come on Indy, you're better than this.

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0 likes  

Shaun Alleman

9 hours ago

Why can't you just stick to the true story instead of getting people worked up? It puts me off reading the news these days

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2 likes  

HomeintheHeat

12 hours ago

What diabolical reporting. Check your facts and change your article immediately!!! There is no problem to drink here in the UAE - only to be drunk. Photos of the immigration staff??? Not allowed as elsewhere in the world. The lady in question allegedly used her Iranian passport when told her Swedish passport was expired, and she then kicked off when she was told to pay for a visa. Once again Detained in Dubai mislead the public with outrageous claims. When in another country, ignorance is no defence.

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