



Minister of Justice of the Syrian Arab  
Republic  
Mr. Najm al-Ahmad  
Al-Nasr Street  
DAMASCUS  
Syrian Arab Republic

Amsterdam, May 6<sup>th</sup> 2013

Subject: Mr. Burhan al Sakkal and his colleagues

Your Excellency,

The Dutch Lawyers for Lawyers Foundation (*'Stichting Advocaten voor Advocaten'*; L4L) is committed to helping lawyers around the world who are prevented from exercising their profession due to improper interference. Our foundation would like to express its grave concern about the death of our highly esteemed colleague, Mr. Burhan al Sakkal.

According to our information, Mr. Burhan al Sakkal died recently while in detention. He had been imprisoned since October 12, 2012, when his house was raided by intelligence officers. We have been informed that he has been subjected to severe torture and he has been denied access to adequate medical treatment. This is a wrongful act for which the Syrian Arab Republic incurs responsibility and which cannot be excused by referring to the domestic political situation.

Unfortunately, Mr. Burhan al Sakkal is just one of the many Syrian lawyers who have faced detention or other forms of severe repression by the Syrian authorities. At least 37 lawyers remain in detention, all of which have been a victim of enforced disappearance. Their whereabouts are unknown.

L4L urges the government of the Syrian Arab Republic to recognize the valuable role played by human rights lawyers and to promote and support their work in line with the Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers, adopted by the Eighth United Nations Congress on the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders in 1990, that provide for a number of rights and responsibilities for lawyers acting in their professional capacity.

In particular articles 16 and 17 of the United Nations Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers state that the government is under an obligation 'to ensure that lawyers are able to perform all of their professional functions without intimidation, hindrance, harassment or improper interference'. Further: 'Where the security of lawyers is threatened as a result of discharging their functions, they shall be adequately safeguarded by the authorities'.



Pursuant to article 23, '[L]awyers like other citizens are entitled to freedom of expression, belief, association and assembly. In particular, they shall have the right to take part in public discussion of matters concerning the law, the administration of justice and the promotion and protection of human rights and to join or form local, national or international organizations and attend their meetings, without suffering professional restrictions by reason of their lawful action or their membership in a lawful organization'.

These principles are universally applicable. Therefore, Your government is under an obligation to adequately protect and support its lawyers.

In view of the above, L4L strongly urges your government to honour its international human rights obligations and to put an end to the prosecution and detention of lawyers for their legitimate professional activities and the peaceful exercise of their right to freedom of expression and association. In this context L4L again wishes to draw your attention to the fate of Mr. Mazen Darwish, the President of the Syrian Center for Media and the Freedom of Expression and a former lawyer, who was arrested on February 16, 2012, remains arbitrarily detained in Adra Prison, Damascus. Moreover, L4L requests the Syrian authorities to cease all acts of harassment and intimidation aimed at Syria's lawyers. Finally, L4L calls upon Your government to ensure that lawyers shall be treated humanely while in detention and provided proper medical assistance.

We are confident of your good will and sense of justice and will continue to monitor these cases very closely.

On behalf of the President of **Lawyers for Lawyers**, Phon van den Biesen,

Sincerely,  
Lawyers for Lawyers

Adrie van de Streek  
Executive director

Copies of this letter have been sent to:

- the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, Mr. Frans Timmermans;
- the Chair of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, Mr. Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro; and
- the members of the Subcommittee on Human Rights of the European Parliament.