



EURO-MEDITERRANEAN HUMAN RIGHTS NETWORK  
RÉSEAU EURO-MÉDITERRANÉEN DES DROITS DE L'HOMME

الشبكة الأوروبية - المتوسطية لحقوق الإنسان

## PRESS RELEASE

### **SYRIA: Bar Association threatens human rights lawyers instead of giving them protection**

*Copenhaguen, 15 February 2011.* The EMHRN expresses its deepest concerns about the role of the Syrian Bar Association in increasing pressure on and threatening human rights lawyers.

A delegation of European lawyers sent to Syria by EMHRN (January 28-February 2, 2011) on a fact finding mission was supposed to attend disciplinary hearings by the Syrian Bar Association in Aleppo against two prominent human rights lawyers, Mr. Radeef Moustafa and Mr. Abdel-Rahman Najjar. On the day of the hearings, January 31, the mission was told that they were postponed to April 2 and March 20 respectively. The EMHRN fears that Mr. Moustafa and Mr. Najjar could be permanently disbarred by the Syrian Bar Association and be brought before the Supreme State Security Court.

It is not the first time that the Syrian Bar Association undertakes arbitrary disciplinary procedures against a human rights lawyer. On 10 November 2009, the Damascus Bar Association Disciplinary Committee decided to permanently disbar human rights lawyer Mohannad Al-Hassani (Martin Ennals laureate 2010).

Furthermore, the Syrian Bar Association has on several occasions traduced the right to defence of persons under disciplinary procedures. This has been done by notably denying their right to be represented by lawyers of their choice, and preventing them from receiving a copy of their files in clear violation of international standards that govern the functioning of bar associations. It was also reported that presidents of the bar associations have repeatedly refused to grant authorization to lawyers to visit their colleagues who are imprisoned for their human rights activities.

The EMHRN strongly condemns these recurrent restrictions on the activities of human rights lawyers and the constant pressures that are put on them. It recalls that the role of bar associations is to protect human rights lawyers, to guarantee their rights, to “protect their professional integrity”, and to “ensure that lawyers are able, without improper interference, to counsel and assist their clients in accordance with the law and recognised professional standards and ethics” (UN Basic principles on the role of lawyers, 1990).

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**FACTS:**

Mr Radeef Moustafa is accused by the Syrian bar association of violating provisions regulating the legal profession for – among others – being the head of an unauthorised organisation, “dealing with issues to undermine national unity”, and “disseminating false information inciting against the State in all his articles”. Mr. Radeef Moustafa heads the Kurdish Committee for Human Rights in Syria (Al Rased), who has published many reports and articles pertaining to human rights in Syria and in the Arab region.

Mr Abd-Alrahman Najjar is a lawyer active in defending political activists and defending economic, cultural and social rights of the Kurdish minority in the Syria.

Mr Mohammed Al-Hassani was disbarred from the Bar Association for allegedly “publishing false and exaggerated information that weakens the state and its reputation abroad”. This decision was taken before the Second Criminal Court of Damascus sentenced Mr. Al Hassani to a three years prison term in June 2010 during an unfair trial.

Mr Ismail Abdi, a human rights lawyer and board member of the Committes for the defence of democratic freedoms and human rights (CDF, EMHRN member organization), was arrested on 23 August 2010. Mr. Abdi awaits his trial on the ground of – among others - “spreading false news that would undermine prestige of the State”.

Several additional lawyers, including Mr. Anouar Al Bunni, Mr. Mohannad Al Hassani, Mr. Haithem Al Maleh and Mr. Moustafa Ismail are currently detained by the Syrian authorities in relation with their activities of defence of human rights.

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The EMHRN sent a delegation of European lawyers on a fact finding mission to Syria from 28 January to 2 February 2011 to gather information on the situation of human rights lawyers, bar associations, and the functioning of the judiciary in relation to respecting international fair trial standards.

The EMHRN mission team was composed of Mr. Lionel Blackman, lawyer, president of Solicitors International human rights Group (SIHRG), United Kingdom, Mr. Gerrit Nieuwenhuis and Mrs Judith Lichtenberg, lawyers, Holland, also empowered to represent the Dutch Bar Association and the Amsterdam Bar Association. The delegation implemented the field visit together with Mr. Emmanuel Altit, lawyer, France, who received mandate from the International Union of Lawyers (UIA).