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## Syria: Joint appeal to help free Syrian human rights defender Razan Zaitouneh and her colleagues on her birthday



On 29 April, human rights groups worldwide are marking the birthday of Syrian human rights defender **Razan Zaitouneh**, who will be spending it in captivity for the third time along with her three colleagues, her husband **Wael Hamada**, **Samira Khalil** and **Nazem Hamadi**. Join the call to help free the four human rights defenders, who were abducted in December 2013, and send messages of solidarity.

On 9 December 2013, the four human rights defenders – collectively known as the “Duma Four” - [were abducted](#) by a group of armed men who raided the offices of the [Violations Documentation Centre \(VDC\)](#) in Duma, near Damascus. There has been no news of their whereabouts in the past two and a half years but they are presumed to be held by armed groups in control of the area. The family is concerned for Zaitouneh’s health and well-being given the absence of any information.

To help bring attention to their case, “we are hoping once again to shine a light on their disappearance,” says **Rana Zaitouneh**, Razan’s sister. On 30 April, the family is hosting a vigil on Parliament Hill in Ottawa, Canada, co-sponsored by [Amnesty International Canada](#). They are also asking those who are unable to attend to post messages of solidarity, photos, artwork, or anything else that may spread awareness over the next week. For more information on the vigil, visit the Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/events/624548577704940/>.

You can post a message or a photo of yourself with the photo above at <https://www.facebook.com/Celebrating-Razan-Zaitounehs-Birthday-1534775286818856/>

One of three finalists for the 2016 [Martin Ennals Award](#) for Human Rights Defenders, “Razan has dedicated her life to defending political prisoners, documenting crimes against humanity, and helping others free themselves from oppression.”

Zaitouneh was awarded the 2011 [Sakharov Prize](#) for Freedom of Thought and the 2011 [Anna Politkovskaya Award](#) of Reach All Women in War (RAW in WAR) among other accolades, for her human rights work.

In February, a coalition of NGOs nominated Zaitouneh as the prisoner of the month as part of the “Their freedom is their right” campaign initiated by the Arabic Network for Human Rights Information (ANHRI) and Maharat Foundation. See <http://www.gc4hr.org/news/view/1178>

**Khalid Ibrahim**, Co-Director of the Gulf Centre for Human Rights (GCHR), says, “I worked with Razan for many years. It would have been very easy for Razan to leave Syria and have a luxury life in any Western country of her choice, however she decided to stay in Syria to do the job she knows best and loves more than anything else which is to defend the people's rights in Syria.” For a recent joint action hosted by GCHR and other rights groups, see: <http://www.gc4hr.org/news/view/1140>

“Zaitouneh has been one of the most prominent and effective lawyers defending political prisoners in Syria since 2001,” says FIDH President, **Karim Lahidji**. Zaitouneh was head of the VDC, which is active in monitoring and reporting on human rights violations in Syria. Human rights organisations believe that the abduction of the four human rights defenders was a direct result of their peaceful human rights work. Their ongoing detention forms part of a wider pattern of threats and harassment against human rights defenders by both government forces and non-state actors.

Just prior to her abduction, Zaitouneh, in a [video interview](#) with FIDH, said, “Nothing, not even our 100,000 deaths or harsh siege, or betrayal of the international community can ever defeat the will of people who have a dream and faith in the future.”

This birthday campaign for Razan Zaitouneh and her colleagues is supported by:

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2. ARTICLE 19
3. Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID)
4. Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (CIHRS)
5. CIVICUS
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7. Front Line Defenders
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17. Lawyers for Lawyers
18. Lawyers Rights Watch Canada (LWRC)
19. Maharat Foundation
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21. Nazra for Feminist Studies
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24. RAW in WAR (Reach All Women in WAR)
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28. Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression
29. Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR)

30. Violations Documentation Centre (VDC)
31. World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT), within the framework of the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders