

**06-October-2015**

**Syria: Joint Statement Urging Release of Human Rights Lawyer Khalil Ma'touq**



On the third anniversary of the enforced disappearance of Syrian human rights lawyer **Khalil Ma'touq** and his assistant and friend **Mohamed Zaza**, the undersigned organizations are reiterating their call for the two men's immediate and unconditional release.

The two men are believed to have been arrested on 2 October 2012 at one of the various government-operated checkpoints en route from Ma'touq's home in the Damascus suburb of Sahnaya to his office in Damascus. Requests for information made to the public prosecutor in Damascus by his family and colleagues in 2012 and 2013 only led to the Syrian authorities denying the arrest of the men. Since then their families and friends have not received any information from the authorities about their wellbeing or whereabouts. Released detainees have, on the other hand, informed Ma'touq's family that they spotted him in various government-operated detention facilities, including State Security Branch 285 and Military Intelligence Branch 235 in Damascus.

Although it is not clear exactly why the men were arrested, their enforced disappearance is likely related to Ma'touq's work as a human rights lawyer specialized in the defence of political prisoners. He has worked, often pro bono, with hundreds of persons detained solely for the legitimate exercise of their human rights. He is also the director of the Syrian Centre for Legal Studies and Research. In 2015, he ended in second place on the shortlist for the Lawyers for Lawyers Award for lawyers "who work to promote the rule of law and human rights in an exceptional way and are threatened because of their work."

Torture and other ill-treatment is rife in detention centres operated by the Syrian security forces and detainees are routinely subjected to appalling conditions. Former detainees at Branch 235, where Ma'touq was reported to have been seen, said that they were held in poor conditions in crowded cells with inadequate access to food, water and hygienic facilities. One detainee said that approximately five men from his cell died each day, which he attributed to either the result of torture or disease, including due to the detention conditions. Ma'touq suffers from advanced lung disease and his life may be at risk as he needs medication and medical attention.

Ma'touq and Zaza continue to be held despite calls by the international community to end the practices of enforced disappearances and torture and other ill-treatment in detention facilities in Syria. UN Security Council Resolution 2139 of February 2014 demanded the release of all those arbitrarily detained, a call reiterated by a UN Security Council Presidential Statement issued on 17 August 2015.

The Syrian authorities must heed these calls without further delay and release immediately and unconditionally Khalil Ma'touq and Mohamed Zaza as well as all others detained solely for the peaceful exercise of their human rights.

The UN Security Council should ensure the effective and immediate implementation of UN Resolution 2139 as well as unhindered access of independent international monitors to all persons deprived of their liberty.

**Signatories:**

1. Action by Christians for the Abolition of Torture (ACAT)
2. Africa Freedom of Information Centre (AFIC)
3. Amman Center for Human Rights Studies
4. Amnesty International
5. Arab Foundation for Development and Citizenship
6. Arab Network for Human Rights Information (ANHRI)
7. Bahrain Centre for Human Rights (BCHR)

8. Canadian Journalists for Free Expression (CJFE)
9. Centre for Democracy and Civil Rights in Syria
10. CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation
11. Committees for Defending Democratic Freedoms and Human Rights in Syria
12. Egyptian Organisation for Human Rights
13. El-Nadeem Center for Rehabilitation of Victims of Violence
14. Euromed Rights (EMHRN)
15. FIDH (International Federation for Human Rights), within the framework of the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders
16. Foundation for Freedom of Thought and Expression
17. Front Line Defenders
18. Gulf Center for Human Rights (GCHR)
19. Humanistic Institute for Development Cooperation (HIVOS)
20. Human Rights Organization in Syria (MAF)
21. Human Rights Watch (HRW)
22. Ilam Arab Center for Media Freedom, Development and Research
23. International Civil Society Action Network (ICAN)
24. International Media Support (IMS)
25. Iraqi Journalists Rights Defense Association (IJRDA)
26. Kurdish Committee for Human Rights in Syria (Observer)
27. Kurdish Organization for Human Rights in Syria (DAD)
28. Lawyers for Lawyers
29. Maharat Foundation
30. March Lebanon
31. Media Foundation for West Africa
32. Metro Centre to Defend Journalists in Iraqi Kurdistan
33. National Organization for Human Rights in Syria
34. National Union of Somali Journalists (NUSOJ)
35. No Peace Without Justice (NPWJ)
36. Organization of Defending Prisoners of Opinion in Syria (Rawanka)
37. Pax for Peace – Netherland
38. Pen American Center
39. Pen International
40. Rethink Rebuild Society
41. Sisters Arab Forum for Human Rights (SAF)
42. SKeyes Center for Media and Cultural Freedom
43. Syrian American Council
44. Syrian Centre for Legal Studies and Research
45. Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR)
46. The Day After
47. Tunisian Initiative for Freedom of Expression

48. Vigilance for Democracy and Civic State
49. Violations Documentation Center in Syria (VDC)
50. World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT), within the framework of the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders
51. Yemen Organization for Defending Human Rights and Democratic Freedom