



Syria

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Muhannad Al-Hassani, awarded human right defender, beaten in prison

November 2, 2010 - The Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, a joint programme of the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) and the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT), condemns the beating in prison of human rights lawyer Muhannad Al-Hassani days after he received the Dean Award of the Amsterdam Bar Association and the Martin Ennals Award for 2010.

On October 28, 2010, Mr. **Muhannad Al-Hassani**, a Syrian lawyer, President of the Syrian Organisation for Human Rights "Sawasiya", Commissioner of the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ), who is serving a three years sentence, was attacked by a cell mate.

Mr. Muhannad Al-Hassani, who shares a cell with 30 common convicts, was attacked by one of his cell mates and beaten severely causing a cut in his forehead and the swelling of his left eye and cheek that required ten stitches. The attacker, Mr. Mohammad Hamadi is serving time for rape, armed robbery and forming a criminal gang. It was reported that while he was beating Mr. Al-Hassani, he was screaming at him accusing him of not being a nationalist. Following the assault, the prison authorities opened an investigation on the assault. Though the attacker threatened to kill Mr. Al-Hassani before the investigation committee, these threats were not recorded in the charge sheet.

Several days after the assault, Mr. Al-Hassani remains detained in the same cell together with his attacker, despite his request to transfer the latter to another cell. The Observatory fears that Mr. Al-Hassani could face further acts of violence and expresses its deepest concern about his security while he continues to be arbitrarily detained, as similar attacks against other imprisoned human rights defenders were reported in the past.

On September 27, 2010, the Criminal Chamber at the Court of Cassation had rejected the defence appeal confirming the sentence of three years in prison issued by the Second Damascus Criminal Court on June 23 for "weakening national sentiments and encouraging racist and sectarian feelings" and "transferring false and exaggerated news that weaken national sentiments" under Articles 285, 286 and 287 of the Criminal Code.

The Observatory urges the authorities to ensure Mr. Muhannad Al-Hassani physical and psychological integrity as well as of all human rights defenders in Syria. The Observatory also call the authorities to carry out a prompt, effective, thorough, independent and impartial investigation into the above-mentioned attack, the result of which must be made public, in order to bring all those responsible before a competent court and to release Muhannad Al-Hassani, as his detention is arbitrary and it aims at punishing him for his human rights activities.

<http://www.fidh.org/Muhammad-Al-Hassani-awarded-human-right-defender>