

## THE OBSERVATORY - PRESS RELEASE

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### SYRIA: A lawyer dies under torture, dozen of others linger in prison

Paris-Geneva, April 24, 2013. *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 vehemently the torture to death of lawyer and human rights defender Burhan Al Sakkal and urges the Syrian authorities to immediately and unconditionally release all lawyers currently arbitrarily detained in Syria. The international community should pay the utmost attention to the current fate and whereabouts of lawyers in Syria, who are particularly exposed to acts of reprisal and harassment.*

On April 16, 2013, the family of lawyer **Burhan Al Sakkal** was informed by the military police that the latter had died in detention and had been buried in an unknown location. The police only returned the lawyer's identity document to his family. Mr. Burhan Al Sakkal had been arrested on October 12, 2012 by members of Syrian intelligence during a raid conducted on his house. Since his arrest, no information was provided by the authorities on the whereabouts of Mr. Al Sakkal. According to credible information received, during detention, he was subjected to severe torture and denied appropriate medical treatment.

Mr. Burhan Al Sakkal was arrested twice since the beginning of the revolution, his house was set on fire, his spouse was subjected to many assaults, and his family was displaced many times as an act of retribution for his human rights activities.

Mr. Burhan Al Sakkal was one among many lawyers lingering in Syrian cells. At least 37 lawyers are detained today in Syria. All of them have been victims of enforced disappearance as their whereabouts and fate remain unknown. The list includes **Khalil Maatouk** who was arrested on October 2, 2012<sup>1</sup>, and also **Mazen Salah**, arrested on June 16, 2011, **Ahmed Saleh Bayoun**, arrested on September 14, 2011, **Mohamed Kheir Domani** arrested on February 29, 2012, **Samer Idris** arrested on June 11, 2012, **Ali Aswad** arrested on August 15, 2012, **Ahmed Amroush** arrested on August 15, 2012, **Amer Ezzedine** arrested on August 15, 2012, **Mohamed Mokdad** arrested on September 20, 2012, **Malek Geyoush** arrested on September 29, 2012, **Ezzam Zahloul** arrested on October 12, 2012, **Mohamed Khalil** arrested on November 17, 2012, **Maysar Hadid** arrested on November 20, 2012, **Mohamed Fadl**, arrested on November 20, 2012, **Ismail Salama** arrested on June 11, 2012, **Mohamed Qabaqabqi** arrested on October 4, 2012, **Mohamed Aref** arrested on October 4, 2012, **Mahmoud Hamam** arrested on October 4, 2012, **AbdelSallam Hassan El Khodeir** arrested on October 4, 2012, **Ahmed Said** arrested on June 15, 2012, **Essam El Toqi** arrested on June 15, 2012, **Fahd Mousa** November 27, 2012, **Mohamed Al Marei** arrested on October 13, 2012, **Farag Haboul** arrested on June 12, 2012, **Nader Gabaly** arrested on July 18, 2012, **Belal Hegazi** arrested on October 7, 2012, **Abdel Nasser Moles** arrested on July 4, 2012, **Wael Mashhouh** arrested on July 3, 2012, **Hussein Mashhouh** arrested on July 3, 2012, **Mohamed Baghdadi** arrested on September 20, 2012, **Nayef Fays El Rifaei** arrested on March 22, 2012, **Abdelkarim El Qadour El Hawash** arrested on August 20, 2012, **Iyad El Kordi** arrested on March 10, 2013, **Imad El Kordi** arrested on March 10, 2013, **Omar Qabnes** arrested on January 15, 2013, **Abdelsallam Al Atrash** arrested on June 3, 2012 and **Salam Othman** arrested on June 3, 2012.

All of them are placed outside the protection of the law and given the appalling situation and frequent use of torture in Syrian detention facilities, there are very serious concerns for their safety and security and the lack of adequate medical care.

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<sup>1</sup> See Observatory Press Release, February 18, 2013.



The Observatory recalls that former lawyer **Mazen Darwish**, President of the Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression (SCM), who was arrested on February 16, 2012, remains in arbitrary detention in Adra Prison in Damascus.

The Observatory calls upon the Syrian authorities to immediately disclose the whereabouts of all lawyers and human rights defenders and release them immediately and unconditionally, as well as to carry out an effective, thorough and impartial investigation into the above-mentioned events, in order to identify all those responsible, bring them before a civil, competent and impartial tribunal, and apply to them the penal sanctions provided by the law.

The Observatory further urges the Syrian authorities to put an end to all acts of harassment against human rights defenders and to conform in all circumstances with the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Defenders (1998) as well as international human rights instruments ratified by Syria.

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