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Middle East/North Africa - Syria

Joint appeal Free Key Rights Defenders

17 March 2014

Government Arbitrarily Holds Darwish, Colleagues Despite UN Demands

(Geneva, March 17, 2014) – The government of Syria should immediately and unconditionally release the arbitrarily detained human rights defender **Mazen Darwish** and his colleagues **Hani Al-Zitani** and **Hussein Ghareer**, 55 human rights organizations said today. The United Nations Security Council demanded the release of all arbitrarily detained people in Syria on February 22, 2014.

Darwish and his colleagues, held in violation of international standards by government authorities for over two years, are in the Adra central prison in Damascus pending trial before the Anti-Terrorism Court.

On March 10, the head of the Anti-Terrorism Court postponed the men's trial for the seventh consecutive time, to March 24. The latest postponement was reportedly because a trial judge was sick but previous postponements were due to the government's failure to present evidence against the three men.

The trial has failed to comply with international fair trial standards, the organizations said. The detainees have not seen the evidence against them, and fear that evidence extracted under torture may be used against them. There have also been excessive delays.

Syrian Air Force Intelligence arrested the three men on February 16, 2012, in Damascus, when officers raided the offices of the Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression (SCM), a key local nongovernmental organization working to disseminate information regarding the human rights situation in Syria. The government has brought terrorism charges against the three men for their work at SCM, and despite credible reports that security forces subjected them to torture while in detention, there has been no investigation into the abuses.

Their ongoing detention is a part of a wider campaign of threats and harassment against human rights defenders in Syria which appears intended to prevent them from carrying out their legitimate and peaceful human rights work, the organizations said.

Despite repeated calls by the international community, including the United Nations, for the release of the three human rights defenders, the authorities have refused to release them. A May 15, 2013 UN General Assembly resolution included a demand for their immediate release and on January 14, 2014, the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention found their detention to be arbitrary and called for their release.

The Syrian authorities should immediately carry out UN Security Council Resolution 2139 adopted on February 22, 2014, the organizations said. The resolution demands the immediate end of arbitrary detention, torture, kidnappings, abductions, and forced disappearances and the release of all arbitrarily detained persons. In so doing, the government should immediately and unconditionally release and drop all charges against Darwish, Ghareer, and Al-Zitani.

The UN Security Council and the international community, in particular countries supportive of the Syrian government, should press for the immediate and unconditional release of all those currently arbitrarily detained, the organizations said.

The 61 organizations are: · Albadeel for studies and research/ Jordan

· Amnesty International

· Ana Press

- Arab Foundation for Development and Citizenship
- Arab Working Group for Media Monitoring
- Arabic Network for Human Rights Information (ANHRI)
- Article 19
- Asharq Center (Saudi Arabia)
- Assyrian Human Rights Network
- Bahrain Centre for Human Rights (BCHR)
- Bahrain Human Rights Society (BHRS)
- Bahrain Youth Society for Human Rights (BYSHR)
- Cairo Institute for Human rights Studies (CIHRS)
- Canadian Journalists for Free Expression (CJFE)
- Center for Civil Society and Democracy in Syria
- Cham Center For Democratic and Human Rights Studies
- CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation
- Damascus Center for Human Rights Studies (DCHRS)
- Development for People and Nature Association (DPNA)
- Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network (EMHRN)
- Freedom Foundation (Yemen)
- Front Line Defenders
- Gathered Lawyers Kobani
- Gulf Centre for Human rights (GCHR)
- Humanist Institute for Cooperation with Developing Countries (Hivos)
- Human Rights Watch (HRW)
- Institute for War & Peace Reporting (IWPR)
- International Center For Supporting Rights and Freedoms
- International Media Support (IMS)
- International Institute for Nonviolent Action
- Iraqi Institution for Development
- Iraqi Intuition for the Civil Development
- Iraqi Journalists Rights Defense Association (IJRDA)
- Iraqi Network for Social Media
- Itana for Documentation
- Jordanian Commission for Democratic Culture (JCDC)
- Kurdish Organization for Human Rights and General Freedom in Syria (DAD)
- L'Association Saharaouie des Victimes des Graves Violations des Droits de l'Homme Commises par l'Etat Marocain (ASVDH)
- Lawyers for Lawyers (L4L)
- Maharat

- Media International Support (IMS)
 - Monitor of Human Rights in Oman
 - Monitor of Human Rights on Saudi Arabia
 - My Right Syrian Organization for Woman And Children
 - Nooraldine Zaza Cultural Centre- Iraqi Kurdistan
 - Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH)
 - Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT)
 - Palestinian Center for Development and Media Freedoms (MADA)
 - PAX for Peace
 - PEN International
 - Reporters Without Borders (RSF)
 - Samir Kassir Foundation - SKeyes Center for Media and Cultural Freedom
 - Syrian Al Karama Media Center
 - Syrian Center for Legal Studies and Research
 - Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression (SCM)
 - Syrian Network for Human Rights
 - Syrian Observer
 - Syrian Women for Development
 - The Day After Association
 - Violation Documentation Center in Syria (VDC)
 - Yemen Organization for Defending Rights & Democratic Freedoms
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