



Syria

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Authorities must stop acts of intimidation aimed at preventing the holding of peaceful gatherings

A call to protest “against the monocracy, corruption and tyranny” were launched through civil society and social networks such as Facebook and Twitter in Syria. Several demonstrations, which were supposed to take place between Friday and Saturday in several cities across the country, were not in the end followed, with a few exceptions such as in Hassakeh and in some neighbourhoods of some cities. According to our information, several arrests were carried out in Aleppo and Hassakeh in response to calls for protest, and the intelligence services were deployed throughout the streets for four days in Damascus and Aleppo in order to dissuade citizens from exercising their right to freedom of peaceful assembly.

Ghassan Al-Najjar, a syndicalist who is over 70 years and a lawyer close to Al Haytham Al Maleh, was arrested by the intelligence services on Friday February 4 at his home in Aleppo around 3 am without an warrant arrest. His arrest came after he had launched several public calls for peaceful demonstrations calling for security forces and the government to stop prosecuting those who aspire to freedom.

Furthermore, on 2 February 2011, a group of 15 people expected to hold a candlelight vigil on Bab Touma square in Damascus, in support of the protest movements in Egypt was attacked and insulted upon their arrival on the square by persons in civilian clothes, in full view of police who were present on the scene but did not intervene. The attackers didn't hesitate to say they were members of the security forces.

Subsequently, the demonstrators went to the nearest police station to lodge a complaint against the attackers and report the lack of protection of police force. Most of protesters were expelled from the police station. Soheir Al Attassi, president of Atassi Forum, a political discussion group, daughter of Jamal al Atassi and an active civil society was detained at the station where she was beaten, humiliated and threatened with death. She was released several hours later.

FIDH fears that the situation will further deteriorate and asks the Syrian authorities to ensure respect for freedom of peaceful assembly and to put an end to acts of intimidation aiming to prevent the holding of peaceful gatherings. Furthermore, FIDH calls for the immediate and unconditional release of Ghassan Al Najjar and stress to the authorities that the security forces have the obligation to ensure the protection and safety of persons exercising their right to freedom of association and peaceful assembly against possible attacks.

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