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Middle East/North Africa - Syria

Joint statement

On the second anniversary of the arrest of Mazen Darwish the human rights situation remains critical as two more human rights defenders are targeted

20 February 2014

16 February 2014 marked the two-year anniversary of the arbitrary arrest of prominent human rights defender Mazen Darwish. Despite the international reaction and calls for his release and that of his colleagues the situation for human rights defenders in Syria remains critical.

On 17 February 2014, the home of detained human rights defender Khalil Ma'touq in Damascus was raided by security forces. His daughter, Ranim an art student, was arrested and his 17 year old son was beaten during the raid. Many personal belongings were confiscated including a laptop and a satellite receiver. Khalil Ma'touq has been in an incommunicado detention since 2 October 2012 as a result of his peaceful human rights activities.

On the same day human rights lawyer Gihan Amin was also arrested. Prior to her arrest she had been particularly active in defending the rights of detainees and representing them in court. She is a member of the Committee for the Defence of Prisoners of Conscience in Syria and a member of the National Organisation for Human Rights in Syria. Her arrest is believed to be directly and solely related to the exercise of her profession as a lawyer.

These incidents come just after the two-year anniversary of the arrest of Mazen Darwish and his colleagues Hani Al-Zaiyati and Hussien Gurier. On 16 February 2012, the Syrian air force intelligence stormed the The Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression in Damascus and arrested the three men. They remain in detention in Adra's prison. It is reported that they have been subjected to torture while in detention. However, allegations of such torture have been met with refusals by the authorities to investigate the allegations. Furthermore, the Syrian authorities have refused to release the human rights defenders despite calls by the United Nations on them to do so. On 15 May 2013, the UN General Assembly adopted resolution 67/262, entitled "The Situation in The Syrian Arab Republic", which demanded the immediate release of Mazen Darwish and his colleagues. Moreover, on 14 Jan 2014, the United Nation's Expert Group on cases of arbitrary detention found their detention to be arbitrary and called for their release.

The undersigned organizations believe the raid on the home of Khalil Ma'touq, the arrest of his daughter Ranim, the beating of his son and the arrest of human rights activist Gihan Amin are directly related to their peaceful and legitimate human rights activities. The undersigned organizations express serious concern for the situation and safety of human rights defender in Syria and calls on the authorities to ensure that they are free to carry out their work safely. The undersigned organizations urge the authorities in Syria to:

1. Immediately and unconditionally release Khalil Ma'touq and his daughter Ranim, Gihan Amin, Mazen Darwish and Hani Al-Zaiyati and Hussien Gurier;
2. Ensure the physical and psychological safety and integrity of Khalil Ma'touq and his daughter Ranim, Gihan Amin, Mazen Darwish, Hani Al-Zaiyati and Hussien Gurier and all human rights defenders in Syria ;
3. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in Syria are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions including judicial harassment.

We respectfully reminds you that the United Nations Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, adopted by consensus by the UN General Assembly on 9 December 1998, recognises the legitimacy of the activities of human rights defenders, their right to freedom of association and to carry out their activities without

fear of reprisals. We would particularly draw your attention to Article 11: "Everyone has the right, individually and in association with others, to the lawful exercise of his or her occupation or profession " and to article 12 (2): "The State shall take all necessary measures to ensure the protection by the competent authorities of everyone, individually and in association with others, against any violence, threat, retaliation, de facto or de jure adverse discrimination, pressure or any other arbitrary action as a consequence of his or her legitimate exercise of the rights referred to in the present Declaration."

Signatories

1. Arabic Network for Human Rights Information (ANHRI)
 2. Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (CIHRS)
 3. Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network (EMHRN)
 4. Front Line Defenders
 5. Gulf Centre for Human Rights (GCHR)
 6. Humanist Institute for Cooperation with Developing Countries (Hivos)
 7. Reporters Without Borders (RSF)
 8. Syrian Center for Media (SCM)
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