

Syrian authorities must drop charges against three human rights defenders and release all prisoners of conscience

14 August 2015

Sixteen international organisations have joined the Syrian Centre for Media and Freedom of Expression (SCM) in welcoming the release of its president **Mazen Darwish** and in calling for all charges against him and his colleagues to be dropped, as well as for the release of all other prisoners of conscience who remain detained by the Syrian authorities.

Whilst welcoming this week's release of Mazen Darwish and of his SCM colleagues **Hani Al-Zitani** and **Hussein Gharir** last month we are extremely concerned that they continue to face charges of 'publicising terrorist acts' and are due to face trial later this month. We continue to call for all charges against them to be dropped immediately and unconditionally, and for an end to the persecution and judicial harassment of the three men for their legitimate human rights work. The authorities in Syria must further guarantee that all human rights defenders are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions.

The organisations also continue to protest the arbitrary detention of many other peaceful activists and others held by the authorities as a result of the legitimate exercise of their human rights, such as the cases currently documented through the Free Syria's Silenced Voices campaign.

Activists who have been targeted by the Syrian authorities include prominent human rights lawyer **Khalil Ma'touq**, who is believed to have been arrested in October 2012 by the Syrian authorities and was later seen in various government-operated security branches. Similarly, Aleppo-based doctor **Mohamed Bachir Arab** has been forcibly disappeared by the Syrian authorities since November 2011, likely because he participated in peaceful demonstrations. Citizen journalist **Ali Mahmoud Othman**, who worked with international journalists in Homs, remains missing after his arrest by Syrian authorities in 2012.

Activists have also been targeted by non-state armed groups. Among others, **Razan Zaitouna** and her colleagues **Samira Al-Khalil**, **Nazem Hamadi** and **Wa'el Hamada** from the Violations Documentation Center in Syria remain missing following their abduction on 9 December 2013.

The Syrian authorities must comply with their obligations under international law, including international human rights and humanitarian law, and release all persons

detained solely for the peaceful exercise of their rights to freedom of expression, freedom of assembly and association or solely for treating the sick and wounded or providing humanitarian assistance. Non-state armed groups, including the Army of Islam and other armed groups operating in Douma and elsewhere in the country, must stop their practice of abducting human rights defenders and release those detained.

Signatories:

Al-Haq

Amnesty International

CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation

Committee to Protect Journalists

English PEN

FIDH

Front line Defenders

Gulf Centre for Human Rights

Human Rights Watch

International Media Support (IMS)

International Press Institute (IPI)

PEN American Center

PEN International

Reporters sans frontières/Reporters without Borders

Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression (SCM)

The Day After

Violations Documentation Center in Syria