

Reporters Without Borders

<http://www.rsf.org/syrie-head-of-media-monitoring-centre-24-03-2011,39859.html>

Middle East & North Africa - Syria

Third arrest

Head of media monitoring centre arrested in Damascus

24 March 2011

Reporters Without Borders is very worried about **Mazen Darwish**, the head of the Syrian Centre for Media and Freedom of Expression, who was summoned for questioning by intelligence officials at 11 a.m. yesterday in Damascus and has not been heard of since. He has almost certainly been arrested.

Darwish was detained for four hours on the evening of 22 March after responding to a summons to report for questioning. He was previously held for several hours on 16 March after being arrested while attending a peaceful sit-in outside the interior ministry headquarters in Damascus as an observer.

His centre, the only NGO monitoring the media and Internet in Syria, has been closed by the authorities twice, in 2005 and 2009.

The Syrian authorities began on 15 March to crack down hard on journalists and media covering the anti-government demonstrations taking place in various cities, especial the southern city of Deraa, which is located near the Jordanian border. Darwish's arrest brings the number of journalists arrested since the start of these protests to three.

Journalist, writer and activist [Louay Hussein](#) was arrested on 22 March in Damascus while journalist, poet and novelist [Mohammed Dibo](#) was arrested on the night of 18 March at his home in Al-Annazah, in the northwestern city of Baniyas. Dibo writes for various newspapers including Jordan's Al-Dustour and many news websites such as Al-Waan (run by the Association of Rational Arabs), Bab el Moutawasset (Mediterranean Gate), Lamp Of Freedom and Shukumaku.

These three join the already long list of journalists and cyber-dissidents imprisoned in Syria.

Reporters Without Borders has meanwhile learned that a photographer and a freelance video reporter working for *Agence France-Presse* and an *Associated Press* photographer were briefly held and roughed up while covering the demonstrations in Deraa on 22 March. Their equipment was seized and was handed back a few hours later.

When the *AFP* journalists tried to return to Deraa yesterday, their equipment was again seized. They have not yet been able to recover it.
