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Middle East/North Africa - Syria

Joint statement

Human rights organizations call on Syrian government to implement the UN Resolution

19 November 2013

The Syrian government should immediately release human rights defenders, **Mazen Darwish**, **Hussein Ghareer** and **Hani Al-Zitani**, members of the Syrian Centre for Media and Freedom of Expression (SCM), and drop all the charges against them. Another hearing of their trial held on 18 November 2013 at the Anti-Terrorism Court in Damascus on alleged terrorism charges brought against them by the Syrian Government's Air Force Intelligence. Reports confirmed that once again the trial was postponed to 27 January 2014, at the request of the prosecution which has failed to prove the charges against them.

Mazen Darwish is a journalist and head of the Damascus based SCM, which was instrumental in disseminating information regarding the situation in Syria to sources outside the country. He was arrested on 16 February 2012 along with 15 others including Hussein Ghareer, and Hani Al-Zitani when Air Force Intelligence conducted a raid on the offices of the SCM in Damascus.

We the undersigned organizations express serious concern for the security and physical and psychological integrity of human rights defenders, Mazen Darwish, Hussein Ghareer, and Hani Al-Zitani and we strongly believe that they are targeted solely due to their peaceful and legitimate human rights activities in Syria. We are also very concerned about their current situation which has had more of a political grounding rather than any legal basis, in particular given that their office was raided without a warrant and in light of the failure of the judiciary to provide any evidence against them.

Our organizations also recall that on 15 May 2013, the UN General Assembly adopted Resolution 67/262 on "The situation in the Syrian Arab Republic" which strongly condemned: *2 all violations of international humanitarian law and the continued widespread and systematic gross violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms by the Syrian authorities and the Government-affiliated shabbiha militias, such as (...) massacres, arbitrary executions, extrajudicial killings, the killing and persecution of protestors, human rights defenders and journalists, arbitrary detention, enforced disappearances, violations of the rights of the child, (...) unlawful interference with access to medical treatment, failure to respect and protect medical personnel, torture, systematic sexual violence, including rape in detention, and ill-treatment, including against children as well as any human rights abuses or violations of international humanitarian law by anti-Government armed groups;*

The resolution also called on the Syrian authorities to:

5. immediately release all persons arbitrarily detained, including the members of the Syrian Centre for Media and Freedom of Expression, publish a list of all detention facilities, ensure that conditions of detention comply with applicable international law, and immediately allow access of independent monitors to all detention facilities;

We believe also that their continuous detention forms part of a wider campaign of threats and harassment against human rights defenders in Syria in order to prevent them from carrying out their legitimate and peaceful human rights work. We, the undersigned groups, therefore:

1. Call on the Syrian authorities to immediately implement the UN General Assembly resolution 67/262 and release immediately and unconditionally Mazen Darwish, Hussein Ghareer, and Hani Al-Zitani as well as all human rights defenders in Syria since their detention is arbitrary as it only aims at sanctioning their human rights activities;

2. Call on the Syrian authorities to drop all the charges against Mazen Darwish, Hussein Ghareer, and Hani Al-Zitani as well as Mansour Al-Omar and Abdel-Rahman Hamada and

human rights defenders in Syria;

3. Call on the Syrian government to respect its international obligations including those outlined in the UN Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, and guaranteed under Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), to which Syria is a state party;

4. Call for the UN and the international community, in particular States supportive of the Syrian regime, to press for the immediate and unconditional release of all those currently detained in violation of their right to freedom of expression, guaranteed under Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), to which Syria is a state party.

Co-sign:

1. Alkarama Foundation
2. Arabic Network for Human Rights Information (ANHRI)
3. Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network (EMHRN)
4. Front Line Defenders
5. Gulf Centre for Human Rights (GCHR)
6. Hivos
7. International Media Support (IMS)
8. Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, a joint programme of the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) and the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT)
9. PEN International
10. Reporters Without Borders (RSF)
11. Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression (SCM)
12. Violations Documentation Centre in Syria (VDC)

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