

Release Khalil Ma'touq Immediately, Unconditionally

Syria: Free Human Rights Lawyer

(Geneva October 2, 2014) – The Syrian government should immediately and unconditionally free the prominent human rights lawyer Khalil Ma'touq and his colleague Mohamed Zaza, 26 organizations said today, on the second anniversary of their enforced disappearance.

Ma'touq, director of the Syrian Center for Legal Studies and Research, is a human rights lawyer who has been defending peaceful activists for more than 20 years. He and his colleague and assistant Mohammed Zaza have been missing since October 2, 2012, when they were en route from Ma'touq's home in Sahanaya, a Damascus suburb, to his office in Damascus. It is believed that they were arrested at a government security checkpoint solely due to their legitimate and peaceful work in human rights.

Multiple reports have indicated that the two men are being held by the Syrian authorities, who appear to move them among various detention facilities in Damascus, including the "Palestine Branch", a detention center run by Military Intelligence. The repeated requests by their families and lawyers for information about their fate and whereabouts and for a visit are rejected. Syrian authorities deny that the men are in custody, placing them at particular risk of torture or other ill-treatment and even extrajudicial execution.

UN Security Council Resolution 2139, adopted on February 22, 2014, strongly condemned the "arbitrary detention and torture of civilians in Syria (..) as well as kidnappings and abductions and enforced disappearances" and demanded "the immediate cessation of such practices and the release of all persons arbitrarily detained."

Ma'touq suffers from advanced lung disease and has severe breathing difficulties. Reports from former detainees indicate that he is in extremely poor health, a source of great concern for his family, his lawyers and the organizations.

The Syrian government should immediately and unconditionally release Ma'touq and Zaza, the organizations said.

The UN Security Council should ensure the immediate implementation of Resolution 2139, and use all the related mechanisms at its disposal to ensure that anyone arbitrarily detained as a result of their peaceful political activism, human rights, humanitarian or media work in Syria is released immediately and unconditionally.

Co-signing organizations in alphabetical order:

Action by Christians for the Abolition of Torture (ACAT)
Amnesty International
Arabic Network For Human Rights Information (ANHRI)
Bahrain Centre for Human Rights (BCHR)
CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation
Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network (EMHRN)
Freedom House
Front Line Defenders
Gulf Centre for Human Rights (GCHR)
Human Rights Watch (HRW)
Humanistic Institute for Development Cooperation (HIVOS)
International Federation for Human Rights – in the framework of the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders (FIDH)
Iraqi Journalists Rights Defence Association (IJRDA)
Iraqi Network for Social Media (INSM)
Lawyers for Lawyers (L4L)
Maharat Foundation
PAX
Reporters Without Borders (RSF)
Samir Kassir Foundation
Syrian Centre for Legal Studies and Research
Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression (SCM)
Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR)
Syrian Women's Network
Tunisian Initiative for Freedom of Expression
Women's Studies Centre - Palestine
World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT) – in the framework of the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders

