

[Syria: Free human rights defenders arbitrarily detained for three years](#)

16.02.2015

The Syrian government should immediately free the prominent Syrian human rights defenders Mazen Darwish, Hani Al-Zitani and Hussein Gharir, who have been arbitrarily deprived of their liberty for three years on the basis of their human rights activities, 71 human rights groups said today.



Text in Arabic follows.

(Geneva) - The Syrian government should immediately free the prominent Syrian human rights defenders Mazen Darwish, Hani Al-Zitani and Hussein Gharir, 71 human rights groups said today, on the third anniversary of their arrest. The three men have been arbitrarily deprived of their liberty on the basis of their human rights activities.

Syrian Air Force Intelligence arrested all those who were present including the three human rights defenders during a raid on the offices of the Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression (SCM) in Damascus on 16 February 2012. All the detained SCM members were released, some on bail, except the three men. Darwish is a journalist and the director of the SCM while Al-Zitani and Gharir are both staff members.

The three men were detained for approximately one year in security branches in conditions amounting to enforced disappearance, where they were subjected to ill treatment and torture. They were then transferred to Adra Central Prison in Damascus.

In February 2013, the three were taken before the Anti-Terrorism Court on charges of 'publicizing terrorist acts' under Article 8 of the Anti-Terrorism Law of 2012. Since then, the court has repeatedly postponed their trial, most recently in January 2015. A new trial date has not yet been set.

Although the government announced a general amnesty on 9 June 2014, that covered the charges against the men, they have not been freed.

The SCM is an important non-governmental organization working to disseminate information regarding the human rights situation in Syria including media freedom and freedom of expression. It has published studies on media freedom, violations against journalists, and the human rights situation in the country, and has documented reports of detained and disappeared civilians.

The undersigned organizations believe that Darwish, Al-Zitani and Gharir are being persecuted as a result of their legitimate human rights work and exercise of their right to freedom of expression in response to the

ongoing crisis in Syria. The Syrian authorities should immediately and unconditionally release the three men and drop all charges against them.

The UN General Assembly, in resolution 67/262 of 15 May 2013 called for the release of the three men. In January 2014, the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention (WGAD) also found that the three men had been arbitrarily deprived of their liberty due to their human rights activities and called for their immediate release.

UN Security Council Resolution 2139, adopted on 22 February 2014, also demanded the release of all arbitrarily detained people in Syria.

Despite these calls, the three men remain in detention. While Gharir continues to be held in Adra central prison, on 31 January, Darwish was transferred to the central prison in Hama, and on 4 February Al-Zitani was transferred to Sweida central prison with no explanation.

The Syrian government should heed the UN's call and immediately release everyone the government is arbitrarily detaining, the organizations said. Staffan De Mistura, the UN special envoy to Syria, should make the release of peaceful activists, including these three detainees, a key priority.

Signatories:

1. Action by Christians for the Abolition of Torture
2. Arab Forum for Alternatives
3. Alkarama Foundation
4. Amnesty International
5. Arabic Network for Human Rights Information (ANHRI)
6. Arab Foundation for Development and Citizenship (London)
7. ARJ EU Working group on arts-rights-justice, Chair
8. Bahrain Centre for Human Rights (BCHR)
9. Cairo Center for Development CCD
10. Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (CIHRS)
11. Canadian Journalists for Free Expression
12. Centre for Democracy and Civil Rights in Syria
13. CIVICUS World Alliance for Citizen Participation
14. Coalition for the Defense of Human Rights (CDHR)
15. Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ)
16. Dawlaty
17. Developmental Interaction Network (DIN)
18. Electronic Frontier Foundation (EFF)
19. El-Nadim Center for Rehabilitation of Victims of Violence
20. Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network (EMHRN)
21. Etana for Documentation and Studies
22. European-Bahraini Organisation for Human Rights (EBOHR)
23. Foundation to Restore Equality and Education in Syria
24. Fraternity Center for Democracy and Civil Society
25. Freedom House
26. Front Line Defenders
27. Gulf Center for Human Rights (GCHR)
28. Humanistic Institute for Development Cooperation (HIVOS)
29. Human Rights Watch (HRW)
30. Initiative for Freedom of Expression - TURKEY
31. International Civil Society Action Network (ICAN)
32. International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), within the framework of the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders
33. International Media Support (IMS)
34. International Service for Human Rights (ISHR)
35. Iraqi Al-Amal Association
36. Iraqi Institute for the Civil Development
37. Iraqi Journalists Rights Defense Association (IJRDA)

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