

**Mr. President
Bashar al-Assad
Presidential Palace
al-Rashid Street
Damascus
Syrian Arab Republic**

Re: Concerns regarding the disappearance of five Syrian human rights lawyers

Your Excellency

I am writing to you on behalf of the Council of Bars and Law Societies of Europe (CCBE), which, through the national Bars and Law Societies of the Member States of the European Union and the European Economic Area, represents more than 1 million European lawyers. In addition to membership from EU bars, it has also observer representatives from a further eleven European countries' bars.

The CCBE, through its Human Rights Committee, places great emphasis on respect for human rights and the rule of law. The CCBE is particularly concerned by the situation of human rights defenders in the world.

The CCBE writes to express its serious concerns over the arrest and detention of five human rights lawyers – Messrs Hussain 'Issa, Tamer Al-Jahmani, Sulayman Nahili, Nidal Al-Shaykh Mammoud and Muhammad Ibrahim 'Issa - between 5 and 27 March 2011.

Especially worrisome is that all five lawyers are being detained in undisclosed locations and it is believed that they are at risk of torture and ill-treatment. The CCBE is informed that their arrest and detention are directly related to their legitimate and peaceful human rights work.

On 5 March 2011, human rights lawyer Muhammad Ibrahim 'Issa was arrested near Damascus. On 27 March 2011, Hussain 'Issa was arrested by Syrian security agents as he left the Palace of Justice. On the same day, Tamer Al-Jahmani was also arrested; it is believed that this occurred as a result of speaking to the media concerning recent events in the city of Daraa. Two days earlier, human rights lawyers Sulayman Nahili and Nidal Al-Shaykh Mammoud were arrested while taking part in a pro-democracy demonstration.

The CCBE is informed that these targeted attacks reflect an on-going and wide scale crackdown by the Syrian authorities against human rights defenders, pro-democracy and political activists in response to on-going protests calling for democratic reforms and improved observance of civil and political rights.

In this context, the CCBE wishes to draw to your attention the following Articles of the United Nations Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers (1990):

Article 16 states that:

Governments shall ensure that lawyers (a) are able to perform all of their professional functions without intimidation, hindrance, harassment or improper interference; (b) are able to travel and to

consult with their clients freely both within their own country and abroad; and (c) shall not suffer, or be threatened with, prosecution or administrative, economics or other sanctions for any action taken in accordance with recognized professional duties, standards and ethics.

Furthermore, Article 23 states that:

Lawyers like other citizens are entitled to freedom of expression, belief, association and assembly. In particular, they shall have the rights to take part in public discussion of matters concerning the law, the administration of justice and the promotion and protection of human rights and to join or form local, national or international organisations and attend their meetings, without suffering professional restrictions by reason of their lawful action or their membership in a lawful organisation. In exercising these rights, lawyers shall always conduct themselves in accordance with the law and the recognised standards and ethics of the legal profession.

In view of the above, the CCBE respectfully urges you to take immediate and effective steps to unconditionally release the five aforementioned imprisoned lawyers, In order to preserve the independence and integrity of the administration of justice, we urge you to guarantee in all circumstances that lawyers in Syria are able to conduct their professional duties without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'G. Dal', with a long horizontal line extending to the right from the end of the signature.

GEORGES-ALBERT DAL

President