

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

Re: Concerns regarding the human rights lawyer Mrs Razan Zeitouneh

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 search at the home of human rights lawyer Mrs Razan Zeitouneh and arrest of her husband.

The CCBE is informed that on 12 May, the home of human rights lawyer Mrs Razan Zeitouneh in Damascus was searched by Syrian authorities and her husband was arrested. It is believed that the Syrian authorities are allegedly stepping up their threat and harassment of this prominent Syrian human rights defender and lawyer to force her to stop her human rights activism.

On 12 May, the authorities entered the home of Mrs Razan Zeitouneh and the house was searched by security forces who were seeking to arrest her. It is reported that when they failed to find her, they arrested her husband who still remains held incommunicado in an unknown destination. His arrest follows his brother's arrest on 30 April. The CCBE is informed that the two men are apparently being held in an attempt to force Mrs Razan Zeitouneh to surrender herself to the authorities.

It is believed that the arrest and detention of Mrs Razan Zeitouneh's husband and brother-in-law is intended to intimidate her to surrender to the authorities and desist from her human rights work.

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 Mrs Razan Zeitouneh's husband and brother-in-law, as it is believed that their arrest and detention are directly related to Ms Razan Zeitouneh's work as a human rights lawyer. In addition, the CCBE respectfully requests that you preserve the independence and integrity of the administration of justice and guarantee in all circumstances that human rights defenders 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