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*Le Président*  
The President

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

**Re: Concerns regarding human rights lawyer Mr. Mustafa Osso**

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 Mr Mustafa Osso, prominent human rights lawyer and chairperson of the Board of Trustees of the Kurdish Organisation for the Defence of Human Rights and Public Liberties, Syria (DAD).

The CCBE is informed that on 1 August 2011, Mr. Mustafa Osso was interrogated for one and a half hours by the Syrian Bar Association following a statement he made to Syrian media in which he is alleged to have undermined the legitimacy, sovereignty and prestige of the Syrian Arab Republic, and as a result was accused of breaching the Syrian lawyers' code of conduct.

Furthermore, it is believed that Mr. Mustafa Osso was interrogated about his participation in a peaceful gathering that took place on 26 July 2011, the objective of which was to demand the release of a number of detainees, most of whom have been held in incommunicado detention for a number of years and are awaiting court hearings.

Following the interrogation, the CCBE has learned that Mr. Mustafa Osso defended his actions before the Syrian Bar Association and stated that by participating in the peaceful demonstration, he had exercised his right, both as a Syrian citizen and as a human rights lawyer, to participate in the political, social and cultural affairs of the Syrian State. Mr. Mustafa Osso advocated for greater respect for human rights and democracy, the abolition of the state of emergency and martial law, and the recognition of the right to peacefully demonstrate, as provided for under international human rights law.

The CCBE understands that the interrogation of Mr. Mustafa Osso is directly related to his legitimate human rights work and may be intended to strip him of his licence to practise law, a move which would then allow for his arrest by Syrian authorities.

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: ensure that Mr. Mustafa Osso is not subjected to future interrogations by the Syrian Bar Association and guarantee that he is not stripped of his licence to practise law; and guarantee in all circumstances that human rights lawyers in Syria are able to conduct their professional duties without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions, in order to preserve the independence and integrity of the administration of justice.

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