
Le Président
The President

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

Re: Concerns over the escalation of acts of harassment and arbitrary arrests of lawyers in Syria

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 escalation of acts of harassment and arbitrary arrests of lawyers in Syria.

According to information received, numerous gatherings of lawyers have been organised across the country, in order to demand the end of repression towards peaceful demonstrators, and respect for human rights and democratic principles. In most of the cases, nevertheless, security agents and militias have tried to stop gatherings, attacking participants and conducting arbitrary arrests.

Reportedly, on 22 August 2011, while a group of lawyers was organising a gathering in front of the courthouse in the Eastern city of Raqqa, at least 19 lawyers were arrested: Messrs. **Abdallah Al Khalif, Abdul Razaq Al Setm, Ashid Al Aly Al moussa, Ali Al Fares, Fahed Al Birm, Farhan Alnoani, Ghaleb Amin, Mahmoud Aicha, Mahmoud Al Hadi, Mahmoud Al Isa, Mahmoud Al Tiyaoui, Mahmud Wali, Mohamad Shalash, Oboud Nouheir Al Ourian, Omar Al Aly Al Khalil, Yasser Ahmad Al Kerbou, Ms. Rana Ibrahim** and Ms. **Rim Shanaa** (who is pregnant), in addition to the lawyer and human rights activist **Abdullah Al Khalil**.

While Ms. **Rana Ibrahim** and Ms. **Rim Shanaa** were released on August 24, the rest of the lawyers remained detained incommunicado. The CCBE believes that there is a high risk that these persons will be subjected to ill-treatment or torture.

On August 23, lawyers in several major cities organised gatherings in front of courthouses and local offices of the Syrian Bar Association in order to condemn the arbitrary arrests and abuses committed by security agents against lawyers, and to criticise the lack of independence of the Syrian Bar Association. Sit-ins were held in Damascus, Soueida, Hassakeh and Aleppo. In Hassakeh, several lawyers, including **Moustafa Oso**, Chairman of the Kurdish organisation for human rights "DAD", were assaulted in the presence of the President of the Hassakeh Branch of the Syrian Bar Association. In the evening of the same day, lawyer and human rights activist **Mohammed Issam Zaghloul** was arrested in Damascus. It is believed that his arrest follows his participation in the sit-in held in front of the Damascus Bar Association.

In in the last three months, more than 80 lawyers have been subjected to arbitrary arrests due to their peaceful exercise of freedom of expression and freedom of assembly.

The CCBE is informed that the Syrian Bar Association has consistently failed to support its members, though imprisoned or abused by security agents.

The CCBE believes that this repression and harassment are aimed at sanctioning their activities in favour of human 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.

Article 23 states that:

Lawyers like other citizens are entitled to freedom of expression, belief, association and assembly. In particular, they shall have the right 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 organizations and attend their meetings, without suffering professional restrictions by reason of their lawful action or their membership in a lawful organization. In exercising these rights, lawyers shall always conduct themselves in accordance with the law and the recognized standards and ethics of the legal profession.

Furthermore, Article 27 and 28 state that:

Charges or complaints made against lawyers in their professional capacity shall be processed expeditiously and fairly under appropriate procedures. Lawyers shall have the right to a fair hearing, including the right to be assisted by a lawyer of their choice.

and

Disciplinary proceedings against lawyers shall be brought before an impartial disciplinary committee established by the legal profession, before an independent statutory authority, or before a court, and shall be subject to an independent judicial review.

In view of the above, the CCBE respectfully urges you to take effective steps to respect in all circumstances the integrity of lawyers, to respect the right of lawyers to freedom of expression and peaceful demonstration, and to put an end to all forms of harassment or measures of intimidation against lawyers.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'G. Dal', is enclosed in a thin black rectangular border. The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

GEORGES-ALBERT DAL
President