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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 the situation of lawyer Mr Abdulla Al Khalil**

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 situation of human rights defender and lawyer Mr Abdulla Al Khali, a member of the Detainees Defence Team in Al Riqqa, who has been summoned to court in Al Riqqa on 6 February 2012 on criminal charges including aggression towards state property and illegal building. These charges carry with them sentences ranging from two to six years imprisonment.

The CCBE believes that these charges are a result of his activities as a human rights lawyer, who provided free legal aid and financial assistance to dozens of victims of arbitrary arrest and detention since the uprising in the country began in March 2011. Since Mr Abdulla Al Khali began this work, he has been subjected to an on-going campaign of intimidation and harassment by the authorities, including detention, judicial harassment and death threats.

In April 2011, Abdulla Al Khalil received death threats from an official of the ruling Ba'ath party. He reported this incident and other verbal abuse and threats he received from Ba'ath party officials to the police and lodged a complaint with the Attorney General. No action, was however, taken against the perpetrators.

The CCBE takes note that Mr Al Khali was arrested several times during the past year including on 22 August 2011, when he was detained inside the Justice Palace building in Riqqa where he was taking part in a sit-down protest with fellow lawyers. He was incarcerated for one week along with 21 other lawyers on charges of taking part in a demonstration.

On 15 December 2011, Abdulla Al Khalil and his son Muhammad were arrested in front of his home by a group of security officers and detained at the criminal security department in separate cells. His son was released the following day, but Abdulla Al Khalil was held incommunicado in solitary confinement during the first day and denied access to sanitary facilities. He was interrogated during the second day of detention and charged with spreading false news and for inciting and taking part in protests.

His clients and family have also been threatened and intimidated as part of the campaign against him. Further court summons are pending against more of his relatives whom the authorities count as his supporters.

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, economic or other sanctions for any action taken in accordance with recognized professional duties, standards and ethics.*

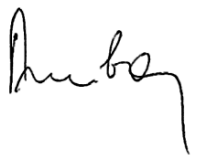
Furthermore, Article 23 states that:

*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 is deeply concerned about the Syrian authorities' campaign of judicial harassment, intimidation, and death threats against human rights defender Abdulla Al Khalil and his family. The CCBE is convinced that this campaign is an attempt to stop him from continuing his human rights work, in particular from providing free legal aid to victims of human rights violations in the context of the on-going Syrian uprising.

The CCBE respectfully urges you to take immediate and effective steps to: immediately stop all forms of harassment and intimidation against Abdulla Al Khalil and his family including economic punishment, death threats and judicial harassment; drop all charges brought against Mr Abdulla Al Khalil; and guarantee that all 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,



Marcella PRUNBAUER-GLASER

President