

PRESS RELEASE - THE OBSERVATORY

Syria: Selective application of amnesty leaves Mazen Darwish in jail

Paris-Geneva, July 24, 2015 – Granted amnesty, Hussain Ghreer and Hani Al-Zaitani were released on July 17 and July 18, 2015, respectively. Both had been arbitrarily detained since February 2012, for promoting freedom of expression and monitoring gross human rights violations committed in Syria. The Observatory welcomes their release, but expresses its extreme concern for the situation of their fellow colleague and Director of the Syrian Centre for Media and Freedom of Expression (SCM), Mazen Darwish, who is still in prison.

While Mr. **Darwish** is listed in the amnesty decree granted on the occasion of Eid al-Fitr, which involved prisoners prosecuted on terrorism charges, the Director of SCM remains behind bars, despite the fact that his colleagues, Messrs **Hani Al-Zaitani** and **Hussain Ghreer** have been released.

On July 22, 2015, a verdict hearing in their trial, which had already been rescheduled twenty-five times since February 2013, was once again postponed and set for August 31, 2015. Therefore, despite the amnesty decree, judicial harassment of the three human rights defenders does not seem to have ended.

“While we welcome the long-awaited release of Hani Al-Zaitani and Hussain Ghreer, the continued detention of Mazen Darwish and their ongoing judicial harassment illustrate the completely arbitrary procedures the three human rights defenders have faced since 2012,” declared FIDH President, Karim Lahidji.

Since the beginning of their detention, the three human rights defenders were held in conditions amounting to enforced disappearance and subjected to acts of torture on several occasions. Most recently, their whereabouts were unknown from May 3, to June 30, 2015. To date, again, the legal status and whereabouts of Mr. Darwish remained unclear.

“This amnesty is a smokescreen. The bad faith of the Syrian authorities is unacceptable. Mazen Darwish should be released immediately and unconditionally and all charges against the three human rights defenders should be dropped,” added OMCT Secretary General, Gerald Staberock.

The Observatory recalls that the UN General Assembly, in Resolution 67/262 adopted on May 15, 2013, called for the release of the three defenders. In January 2014, the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention (WGAD) also found that the three defenders had been arbitrarily deprived of their liberty due to their human rights activities and called for their immediate release. Finally, UN Security Council Resolution 2139, adopted on February 22, 2014 also demanded the release of all arbitrarily detained people in Syria.

The Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders (OBS) was created in 1997 by FIDH and the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT). The objective of this programme is to intervene to prevent or remedy to situations of repression against human rights defenders.

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