

PRESS RELEASE - THE OBSERVATORY

Syria: Finally free, Mazen Darwish must now be acquitted

Paris-Geneva, August 10, 2015 – The release today of prominent human rights defender Mazen Darwish, after three years and a half of detention, is a great relief, said the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders. Despite his release, Mazen Darwish, like his colleagues Hussein Ghrer and Hani al-Zaitani, has been charged with “publicising terrorist acts” and is being tried before the Syrian Anti-Terrorism Court. Our organisation calls for all charges against them to be dropped. The verdict hearing is expected on August 31, 2015.

“Mazen, Hussein and Hani are not terrorists, they are human rights defenders,” FIDH President Karim Lahidji said today. **“All charges against them must be dropped immediately”**, he added.

Since they were arrested on February 16, 2012, the three human rights defenders have been held in conditions amounting to enforced disappearance and subjected to acts of torture on several occasions. Most recently, their whereabouts have been unknown for a period of almost two months between May 3 and June 30, 2015¹.

“We urge the Syrian Anti-Terrorism Court to acquit them during the verdict hearing on August 31, as their judicial harassment has only been aimed at sanctioning their human rights activities”, OMCT Secretary General Gerald Staberock concluded.

Mazen Darwish, Director of the Syrian Centre for Media and Freedom of Expression (SCM), an FIDH member-organisation, had been listed in an amnesty decree granted on the occasion of Eid al-Fitr, together with his colleagues **Hussein Ghrer** and **Hani al-Zaitani**. These latter were released respectively on July 17 and 18, 2015².

On May 15, 2013, in its Resolution 67/262, the UN General Assembly called for the release of the three defenders. In January 2014, the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention 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 has been calling on Syrian authorities to release Mazen, Hussein and Hani since their arrest on February 16, 2012. It is only a year later that they were charged before an investigating judge of the Anti-Terrorism Court, referring explicitly to Mazen Darwish's work to promote and protect human rights to indict them.

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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¹ See the Observatory's Press Release of May 19, 2015

² See the Observatory's Press Release of July 24, 2015.