

Syria: No Word on Activist's Whereabouts

Bassel Khartabil Transferred to Undisclosed Location on October 3

(Beirut, November 4, 2015) – [Syria](#)'s authorities have yet to disclose the whereabouts of Bassel Khartabil, a software developer and defender of freedom of information, one month after his transfer to an undisclosed location, 22 organizations said today. Syrian authorities should immediately reveal his whereabouts and release him.

Military Intelligence detained Khartabil on March 15, 2012. On October 3, 2015, Khartabil managed to inform his family that security officers had ordered him to pack but did not reveal his destination. His family has received no further information. They suspect that he may have been transferred to the military-run Field Court inside the military police base in Qaboun.

“Each day without news feels like an eternity to his family,” a spokesperson for the organizations said. “Syrian authorities should immediately reveal his whereabouts and reunite him with them.”

The Syrian authorities should immediately reveal Khartabil's whereabouts and release him immediately and unconditionally, the organizations said. He is facing Military Field Court proceedings for his peaceful activities in support of freedom of expression.

International law defines an enforced disappearance as an action by state authorities to deprive a person of their liberty and then refuse to provide information regarding the person's fate or whereabouts.

Military Field Courts in Syria are exceptional courts that have secret closed-door proceedings and do not allow for the right to defense. Based on accounts by people who have appeared before these courts, the proceedings were perfunctory – lasting minutes – and did not meet minimum international standards for a fair trial. During a Field Court proceeding on December 9, 2012, a military judge interrogated Khartabil for a few minutes, but he had heard nothing about his legal case since then.

A Syrian of Palestinian parents, Khartabil is a 34-year-old computer engineer who worked to build a career in software and web development. Before his arrest, he used his technical expertise to help advance freedom of speech and access to information via the Internet. Among other projects, he founded Creative Commons Syria, a nonprofit organization that enables people to share artistic and other work using free legal tools. Despite his imprisonment, Khartabil's digital work is still advancing knowledge; last month, colleagues produced [a new 3D model of the ancient Palmyra ruins](#) using data collected by Khartabil before his detention. The UNESCO world heritage site is currently being destroyed by Islamic State, also known as ISIS, fighters, but the project was able to reconstruct their earlier appearance based on Khartabil's measurements.

Khartabil has received a number of awards, including the [2013 Index on Censorship Digital Freedom Award](#) for using technology to promote an open and free Internet. *Foreign Policy* magazine [named Khartabil one of its Top 100 Global Thinkers of 2012](#), “for insisting, against all odds, on a peaceful Syrian revolution.”

List of Signatories:

1. Action by Christians for the Abolition of Torture (ACAT)
2. Article 19
3. Electronic Frontier Foundation (EFF)
4. Euromed Rights (EMHRN)
5. International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) - in the framework of the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders
6. Gulf Center for Human Rights (GCHR)
7. Humanist Institute for Co-operation with Developing Countries (HIVOS)
8. Index on Censorship
9. Lawyer's Rights Watch Canada (LRWC)
10. No Peace Without Justice (NPWJ)
11. Palestinian Center for Development and Media Freedoms (MADA)
12. Pax for Peace – Netherland
13. Pen International
14. Reporters without Borders (RSF)
15. SKeyes Center for Media and Cultural Freedom.
16. Social Media Exchange (SMEX)
17. Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR)
18. Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR)
19. The Day After
20. Violations Documentation Center in Syria – VDC
21. Vivarta
22. World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT) - in the framework of the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders

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