

The Observatory

for the Protection
of Human Rights Defenders

a joint programme



Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights
Network (EMHRN)

Press Release

Syria

Trial against prominent and awarded Syrian human rights defender continues

Copenhagen – Geneva – Paris, January 14, 2005. The Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network (EMHRN) and the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders (a FIDH and OMCT joint programme) express their deep concern over the legal proceedings against Mr. **Aktham Naisse**, President of the Committees of the Defense of Democratic Liberties and Human Rights in Syria (CDF), member of EMHRN, FIDH and OMCT.

On Sunday January 16, 2005, the trial against Mr. Aktham Naisse is scheduled to resume. He is charged with “opposing the objectives of the revolution” and “disseminating false information aiming at weakening the State”, risking a prison sentence of 15 years. Mr. Naisse was arrested on April 13, 2004 and released on bail on August 17, following a decision by the Syrian Supreme State Security Court.

The harassment against Mr. Naisse continues even after his release on bail. In November 2004, Mr. Naisse was refused permission to travel to Morocco by the Syrian security forces.

The EMHRN and the Observatory congratulate Mr. Naisse for winning yet another prominent human rights prize, the 2005 Martin Ennals Award for Human Rights Defenders (MEA). The Martin Ennals Foundation Jury reports that “there was complete consensus among all eleven human rights organisations on the Jury that Aktham deserves the award for his long-standing struggle for the defence of human rights, at the risk of his own health and life” (See the MEA and Observatory Press Releases, January 12, 2005).

The Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network (EMHRN) and the Observatory are deeply worried by the unfair trial against Mr. Naisse. The EMHRN and the Observatory are furthermore highly concerned about the continued harassment of Syrian human rights defenders, especially in the context of the initiation at the end of 2004 of the Association Agreement between the EU and Syria in which article 2 clearly states the Parties’ commitment to respect human rights.

The EMHRN and the Observatory call upon the Syrian authorities:

- to ensure that Mr. Aktham Naisse be brought before a civil, competent and impartial tribunal, and that his procedural rights be guaranteed at all times, including his right to access to counsel;
- to recognise the CDF and other human rights and civil society organisations;
- to put an end to harassment, intimidation, threats, and deliberate attacks on human rights defenders, and to respect its human rights commitments according to international standards and as expressed in the Barcelona Declaration to which Syria is a part as well as the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders (of December 9, 1998)

The EMHRN and the Observatory call upon the European Union and its Member States:

- to send representatives to observe the 16 January trial hearing against Mr. Naisse;
- to demand that Syria respects international human rights and international laws, particularly now that the EU is expected soon to sign an Association Agreement with Syria

The EMHRN and the Observatory call upon the international community:

- to continue expressing their concern about the situation for human rights defenders and human rights organisations in Syria, and to continue supporting them.

Furthermore, the Observatory for the protection of human rights defenders recalls that it will send a mission to Syria on Sunday January 16, 2005 in order to observe Mr. Naisse's trial and urges the Syrian authorities to provide all necessary assistance for the proper fulfilment of its delegate's mandate.

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