

URGENT ACTION

SYRIAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS AND OTHERS STILL HELD

Syrian staff at the Syrian Centre for Media and Freedom of Expression, as well as a visitor to the centre, have been held incommunicado since their arrest on 16 February. They are believed to be held at the Air Force Security branch in Damascus. They may be at risk of torture and other ill-treatment.

Mazen Darwish, aged 40, was arrested along with 13 colleagues and two visitors during a raid on the Syrian Centre for Media and Freedom of Expression (SCM), where he is the director. Of the 16 people arrested, the seven women (one of whom was a visitor to the centre) have since been released; however Mazen Darwish, **Hani al-Zitani**, **Abd al-Rahman Hamada**, **Hussein Gharir**, **Mansour al-Omari**, **Bassam al-Ahmed**, **Ayham Ghazoul**, **Joan Fersso**, and visitor **Shadi Yazbek**, remain held. Their families have not heard from them since and it is not known whether they have had access to a lawyer.

A contact told Amnesty International that uniformed men believed to be from Air Force Security, raided the SCM on 16 February 2012. The security forces arrested the 16 people who were in the building at the time, taking with them laptops, mobile phones and files, all believed to contain confidential information related to the SCM's work. According to one of the released detainees, all were then taken to the Air Force Security branch in Damascus, where Mazen Darwish and the other eight men are believed to remain, apparently without charge or trial.

The reasons for the raid on the SCM remain unknown. Amnesty International believes that Mazen Darwish and his colleagues may have been targeted for their human rights related work. If this is the case then Amnesty International would consider them prisoners of conscience. Visitor Shadi Yazbek is believed to have been arrested solely because he was present inside the SCM at the time of the raid.

Please write immediately in English, Arabic or your own language:

- Express concern that Mazen Darwish, Hani al-Zitani, Abd al-Rahman Hamada, Hussein Gharir, Mansour al-Omari, Joan Fersso, Ayham Ghazoul, Bassam al-Ahmed and Shadi Yazbek have been held incommunicado since 16 February 2012 in conditions which may amount to enforced disappearance;
- Urge the Syrian authorities to ensure that they are protected from torture and other ill-treatment, allowed immediate contact with their families and a lawyer of their choice, and provided with all necessary medical attention;
- Express concern that if the nine men were arrested solely on account of their peaceful activities for, or links with, the Syrian Centre for Media and Freedom of Expression (SCM), they should be released immediately and unconditionally. Otherwise, they should be charged and tried in accordance with international fair trial standards.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 11 APRIL 2012 TO:

<u>President</u>	<u>Minister of Foreign Affairs and</u>
Bashar al-Assad	<u>Expatriates</u>
Presidential Palace	Walid al-Mu'allim
Al-Rashid Street	Ministry of Foreign Affairs and
Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic	Expatriates
Fax: +963 11 332 3410	Al-Rashid Street
Salutation: Your Excellency	Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic
	Fax: +963 11 214 625 12 / 13
	Salutation: Your Excellency

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Please insert local diplomatic addresses below:

Name Address 1 Address 2 Address 3 Fax Fax number Email Email address Salutation Salutation

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**



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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Pro-reform demonstrations began in Syria in February 2011 and evolved into mass protests in mid-March. The protests have been largely peaceful, yet the Syrian authorities have responded in the most brutal manner in their efforts to suppress them. Amnesty International has obtained the names of more than 6,200 people reported to have died during the violence. Most have been killed during or in connection with the protests since mid-March. Many are believed to have been shot by security forces using live ammunition while participating in peaceful protests or attending funerals of people killed in earlier protests. Members of the security forces have also been killed, some by defecting members of the army who have taken up arms against the government.

Thousands of people have been arrested, with many held incommunicado at unknown locations at which torture and other ill-treatment are reported to be rife. Over 270 people are reported to have died in custody in highly suspicious circumstances since 1 April 2011.

The Syrian state has multiple security and intelligence agencies in addition to even more opaque groups, often armed but not necessarily uniformed, who also carry out abductions, killings and other abuses in apparent coordination with, or at least approval of, state officials. Amnesty International has also received reports of armed individuals threatening, abusing and, in some cases, killing people perceived to be linked to or supportive of the state.

Mazen Darwish is the director of the Syrian Centre for Media and Freedom of Expression (SCM). The centre was closed in 2009 by Syrian authorities and was reopened later without government approval. It has since been issuing reports related to violations against journalists and the press and undue restrictions on freedom of expression. Amnesty International has documented the rise of violations against human rights activists and defenders by the Syrian authorities since the beginning of pro-reform protests in Syria in March 2011.

According to the SCM, the female employees of the centre were released on 18 February, on the condition that they report to the Air Force Security every day from 9am to 2pm for further investigations. They are Yara Badr, Sanaa Mohsen, Mayada Khalil, Razan Ghazzawi, Rita Dayoub, Maha Assabalani and the visitor Hanadi Zahlout.

Name: Mazen Darwish, Hani al-Zitani, Abd al-Rahman Hamada, Hussein Gharir, Mansour al-Omari, Joan Fersso, Ayham Ghazoul, Bassam al-Ahmed and Shadi Yazbek

Gender m/f: All male

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