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Syria: Fears for activists arrested in Damascus raid

The Syrian authorities must release or charge a group of at least 14 people arrested on Thursday in a raid on the Syrian Centre for Media and Freedom of Expression in Damascus, Amnesty International said today.

A lawyer based in Syria told Amnesty International that the centre's director Mazen Darwish and Syrian-American blogger Razan Ghazzawi were among those detained.

Security forces removed the group from the office at around 1pm on Thursday and it is believed they are being held at Air Force Intelligence.

"We fear that some or all of those arrested today at the Syrian Centre for Media and Freedom of Expression are prisoners of conscience," said Ann Harrison, interim Deputy Director of the Middle East and North Africa Programme at Amnesty International.

"If this is the case, they should be released immediately and unconditionally. Otherwise they should be charged with an internationally recognizable criminal offence and tried in accordance with international fair trial standards."

"They must also be protected from torture or other ill-treatment while held."

The arrests came just hours before the UN General Assembly was expected to vote on a resolution condemning the Syrian government's brutal crackdown that has killed more than 5,700 people over the last 11 months.