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Clarity needed over fate of Syrian human rights lawyer

A prominent human rights lawyer who disappeared along with his friend as they made their way to work is feared to have been detained by Syrian security forces. If so, he must be released immediately, Amnesty International said.

According to Khalil Ma'touq's family and colleagues, he left his home in Sahnaya, a suburb of Damascus, at 9am in the morning on Tuesday with Mohammed Thatha but never made it to his office in Damascus. There are several government-controlled checkpoints on the route he usually followed and the phones of both men have now ceased to work.

"The families of these men have a right to know what has happened to them. If they are held, they should be released immediately and unconditionally unless they are charged with an internationally recognisable offence," said Ann Harrison, Deputy Director of Amnesty International's Middle East and North Africa programme.

"The situation is particularly concerning as Khalil Ma'touq has a serious lung condition for which he requires medication and regular medical supervision."

Khalil Ma'touq, a member of Syria's Christian minority, was born in 1959 and has been a human rights lawyer for many years. He defended hundreds of political prisoners and prisoners of conscience including before the Supreme State Security Court.