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Syrian-born man charged with spying on activists in USA

The US authorities' arrest of a man accused of spying on Syrian activists in the country sends a message that the Syrian government's crackdown on opposition has its limits, Amnesty International said today.

Mohamad Anas Haitham Soueid, aged 47, is due to appear before a District Court in Alexandria, near Washington, DC, this afternoon.

The Syrian-born naturalized US citizen has been charged with spying on US-based Syrian activists between April and June of this year and sharing 20 audio and video files with the Mukhabaraat, Syria's intelligence agencies.

"It's a very positive development that authorities in the USA have acted on the numerous credible allegations of abuse brought forward by Syrian activists living there," said Neil Sammonds, Syria researcher at Amnesty International.

"Their actions show that the long reach of Syria's intelligence apparatus has its limits. Given the pattern of harassment apparently emanating from Syrian embassies internationally, this investigation and subsequent arrest by the US authorities is precisely the kind of robust action from host governments that we would like to see also in other countries where there is credible information about the threats and harassment faced by Syrian nationals living abroad."

According to US authorities, in June the Syrian government allegedly paid for Soueid to travel to Damascus, where he met President Bashar al-Assad and intelligence officials.

Earlier this month, Amnesty International released a briefing paper on the systematic monitoring and harassment of more than 30 Syrian pro-reform activists living in Europe and the Americas in recent months.

[*The Long Reach of the Mukhabaraat*](#) details how embassy officials and others collaborating with the Syrian government have spied on and intimidated activists across eight countries. In some cases, those still living in Syria have been harassed, detained or even tortured following their relatives' participation in pro-reform protests abroad.

The report includes how Syrian activists in the USA had spoken favourably to Amnesty International of the steps already taken by the US government in response to such reported harassment.

"The freedoms to gather together with others and to speak one's mind are universal rights that are highly valued in the countries where Syrian activists have reported being monitored and threatened," said Neil Sammonds.

"If the host governments' support for these rights is to be credible, they must take concrete action to put an end to Syria's intimidation of peaceful activists."