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Syrian Authorities must immediately and unconditionally release Mazen Darwish and other detained activists

The undersigned Organisations call on the Syrian authorities to immediately and unconditionally release Mazen Darwish, a prominent Syrian human rights defender and Director of the Syrian Centre for Media and Freedom of Expression (SCM) - an organization that enjoys UN ECOSOC consultative status -, as well as seven of his colleagues and a visitor, who were arrested on 16 February 2012 during a raid on their Damascus offices.

In total 16 people were arrested during the raid at SCM offices in Damascus, which was carried out by officers from Air Force Intelligence (AFI) who were assisted by a group of plain-clothed armed men, according to a statement from the SCM. Seven people have been conditionally released and have to report to the detention centre every day for further interrogations.

SCM has played a key role in getting out information about daily developments in Syria as international journalists have only limited access to the country. Mazen Darwish has previously been repeatedly subjected to interrogation by Syrian security services regarding his human rights related activities, including his work with SCM. The arrest of Mazen Darwish and his co-workers is apparently related to their peaceful activities as human right defenders, bloggers and journalists.

"The raid on SCM offices and the detention of Mazen Darwish and his colleagues is a further attack by Syrian security services on Syrian human rights defenders and their rights to freedom of association and expression. This represents the latest attempt to silence those who have been witnessing, documenting and reporting on the ongoing gross human rights violations committed by the Syrian security forces in Syria," said the Organisations. *"The Syrian authorities should immediately and unconditionally release these individuals",* the Organisations added.

Individuals following the case inside Syria reported that they believed the detainees are being held incommunicado at an AFI detention facility in El Mezze, Damascus. The use of torture and other ill treatment has been widespread and systematic in Syrian detention facilities, including in the facilities of the AFI.

"*It is the responsibility of the Syrian authorities to protect Mazen Darwish and his*

colleagues from any form of ill-treatment or torture and to ensure that, as long as they remain in detention, their rights of access to lawyers, family members and independent medical personnel are fully guaranteed", said the Organisations.

Abdorrahman Boroumand Foundation
Alkarama Foundation
Amnesty International
Arab Network for human rights information
Arab Working Group for Media Monitoring
ARTICLE 19: Global Campaign for Free Expression
Association For Women's Rights in Development
Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies
Committee to Protect Journalists
Community Media network
Damascus Center for Human Rights Studies
Doha Centre for Media Freedom
Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network
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FRONT LINE DEFENDERS
Gulf Centre for Human Rights
Human Rights Watch
Humanist Institute for Development Cooperation - Hivos
IKV Pax Christi
Index on Censorship
International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran
International Commission of Jurists
International Media Support
International Press Institute
Iran Human Rights Documentation Center
Iraqi Journalists' Rights' Defense association
Justice for Iran
Maharat Foundation
Observatory for the protection of Human Rights Defenders, joint programme of the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) and the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT)
Reporters Without Borders
Samir Kassir Foundation
Syrian Organization for Human Rights - Swasiah