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Unfair Sentencing of Syrian Lawyer and Human Rights Activist

Amnesty International today condemned the sentencing to three years in prison of veteran 78-year old Syrian lawyer and human rights activist, Haytham al-Maleh.

“As someone who did no more than peacefully express his views on the political and human rights situation in Syria, he should not have been put on trial in the first place, let alone shut up behind bars at the age of 78,” said Philip Luther, Amnesty International deputy director for the Middle East and North Africa.

“Amnesty International considers him a prisoner of conscience and we will be redoubling our campaign for his immediate and unconditional release.”

Haytham al-Maleh has been sentenced to imprisonment for “conveying within Syria false news that could debilitate the morale of the nation” and “weakening national sentiment”, charges commonly used by the Syrian authorities to prosecute and imprison peaceful critics and human rights activists.

The charges arise from a television interview the lawyer gave in September 2009, where he criticized the lack of democracy, the excessive powers wielded by security officials and official corruption in Syria, and his published writings exposing human rights abuses.