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Syria: Detention and harassment of human rights defenders amid harsh repression of protests in the country

Paris-Geneva, August 9, 2011. The Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, a joint programme of the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) and the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT), vehemently condemns the ongoing repression of Syrian human rights defenders, amid harsh and generalised repression in the country.

On August 8, 2011, at least twenty members of Syria's Intelligence Agency (Mukhabarat) arrested Mr. **Walid Al Bunni**, a member of the Syrian Organisation for Human Rights (SWASIAH) as well as of the Founding Committee for the National Dialogue Forum and of the Committees for the Revival of Civil Society, together with his two sons, while at his house in the city of Al Tal, Damascus governorate. One of his sons was later released but as of August 8, 2011, no information could be obtained about the whereabouts of Mr. Al Bunni and his other son.

Moreover, on August 2, 2011, Mr. **Mohamed Najati Tayara**, a human rights activist and former Vice-President of the Syrian Association for Human Rights, was subjected to physical assault in the central prison of Homs, where he has been detained since May 12, 2011. Members of the Syrian security forces violently assaulted eight detainees, including Mr. Najati Tayara, after a sit-in was organised by some prisoners to denounce their arbitrary detention. Mr. Najati Tayara was severely injured and was suffering from severe bleeding as of the end of last week.

Previously, on July 5, 2011, Mr. **Ahmad Tomeh**, elected member of the General Secretariat of the National Council of the Damascus Declaration for Democratic National Change (NCDD), was arrested by the security forces while working at his medical clinic near Der Al-Zor. He was subsequently released in the course of last week, putting an end to a month of incommunicado detention. No information could be obtained as to whether charges are pending against him. Prior to his arrest, Mr. Tomeh had been reporting on human rights violations committed in Der Al-Zor.

The Observatory was also informed of acts of judicial harassment against the brother and husband of the human rights lawyer Ms. **Razan Zaitouneh**, Messrs. **Abd Al-Rahman Hammada** and **Wa'el Hammada**. On July 31, 2011, Mr. Wa'el Hammada was released on bail after two and a half months of arbitrary detention, but he remains charged with alleged "affiliation to a secret society" and for having "initiated sectarianism". On June 27, 2011, Mr. Abd Al-Rahman Hammada was also released on bail after his arrest on

April 30. He was detained incommunicado in the facilities of the Air Force Security and the Adra prison near Damascus, and was reportedly subjected to ill-treatment during his first two weeks of detention. Mr. Al-Rahman Hammada is currently facing several charges including "weakening national sentiment" and "conveying within Syria false information that could hinder the morale of the nation", pursuant to Articles 285 and 286 of the Syrian Criminal Code.

The Observatory firmly condemns the acts of harassment against the above-mentioned human rights defenders, as they provide further evidence of the continued repression of dissenting voices in Syria. Accordingly, the Observatory calls upon the Syrian authorities to guarantee in all circumstances their physical and psychological integrity, to disclose the whereabouts of Mr. Walid Al Bunni and his son and to release them and Mr. Mohamed Najati Tayara immediately and unconditionally, in conformity with the provisions of the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Defenders.
