

Mr. President
Bashar al-Assad
Presidential Palace
al-Rashid Street
Damascus
Syrian Arab Republic

Re: Concerns regarding human rights lawyer Mr. Sabri Mirza

Your Excellency

I am writing to you on behalf of the Council of Bars and Law Societies of Europe (CCBE), which, through the national Bars and Law Societies of the Member States of the European Union and the European Economic Area, represents more than 1 million European lawyers. In addition to membership from EU bars, it has also observer representatives from a further eleven European countries' bars.

The CCBE, through its Human Rights Committee, places great emphasis on respect for human rights and the rule of law. The CCBE is particularly concerned by the situation of human rights defenders in the world.

The CCBE writes to express its serious concerns over the arrest and detention of the prominent Kurdish human rights lawyer Mr. Sabri Mirza, who has regularly provided legal representation to Kurdish activists targeted by the Syrian authorities, in addition to his participation in peaceful demonstrations which have taken place over the past few months.

The CCBE is informed that on 13 June 2011, following his arrest, Mr. Sabri Mirza was held at an unknown location in northern Syria. He has been handed over to Political Security Forces after the local police department summoned him, allegedly to discuss lifting his long-standing travel ban. On 15 June, Mr. Sabri Mirza telephoned his friend to say that the security forces were taking him to Damascus. He has since been held incommunicado at an unknown location. It is believed that Mr. Sabri Mirza suffers from diabetes and heart disease and requires monitoring, guaranteed access to medication and must follow a specific diet. The CCBE is told that it is unknown whether he is being provided with the medication and diet which he requires.

The CCBE understands that the arrest and detention of Mr. Sabri Mirza is directly related to his peaceful and legitimate work in defence of human rights and could be linked to the current government clampdown on public protests and suspected opposition figures.

In this context, the CCBE wishes to draw to your attention the following Articles of the United Nations Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers (1990):

Article 16 states that:

Governments shall ensure that lawyers (a) are able to perform all of their professional functions without intimidation, hindrance, harassment or improper interference; (b) are able to travel and to consult with their clients freely both within their own country and abroad; and (c) shall not suffer, or be threatened with, prosecution or administrative, economic or other sanctions for any action taken in accordance with recognized professional duties, standards and ethics.

Furthermore, Article 23 states that:

Lawyers like other citizens are entitled to freedom of expression, belief, association and assembly. In particular, they shall have the rights to take part in public discussion of matters concerning the law, the administration of justice and the promotion and protection of human rights and to join or form local, national or international organisations and attend their meetings, without suffering professional restrictions by reason of their lawful action or their membership in a lawful organisation. In exercising these rights, lawyers shall always conduct themselves in accordance with the law and the recognised standards and ethics of the legal profession.

In view of the above, the CCBE respectfully urges you to take effective steps to: immediately and unconditionally release Mr. Sabri Mirza; furthermore, if he is not to be released, to allow him contact with his family and a lawyer of his choice and to ensure that he is provided with regular medication and any medical attention which he requires. Finally the CCBE respectfully urges you to guarantee in all circumstances that human rights defenders in Syria are able to conduct their professional duties without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions, in order to preserve the independence and integrity of the administration of justice.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'G. Dal', with a long horizontal line extending to the right from the end of the signature.

GEORGES-ALBERT DAL

President