

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

Brussels, 12th of June 2013

Re: Concerns regarding the deteriorating health of Mr Khalil Matouk, detained incommunicado since October 2012

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 also has observer representatives from a further twelve 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 you to express its serious concerns over the condition of Mr Khalil Matouk, a prominent human rights lawyer and the executive director of Syrian Centre for Legal Studies and Research.

Earlier this year, the CCBE wrote to you to express concern over the arrest and incommunicado detention of this lawyer and urged you to disclose his whereabouts and to ensure his right to due process.

According to the information that we received, since Mr Matouk was arrested on his way to his office in Damascus on 2 October 2012, the Syrian authorities have continued to deny that he is in custody and refused to disclose his whereabouts, despite repeated requests from his family and lawyers,.

The CCBE is alarmed because such conditions increase the risk of him being subjected to torture or other ill-treatment. In addition, reports received from trustworthy sources state that Khalil Matouk's health is deteriorating and his physical condition is extremely poor.

The CCBE would like to express its serious fears for Mr Matouk's health and safety, particularly as he suffers from severe lung disease and there is a reasonable belief that his life might be in danger.

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, economics 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 immediately disclose the whereabouts of Khalil Matouk and to grant him immediate and unfettered access to the medical treatment that he requires, as well as access to his family and lawyers. The CCBE also implores you to take all necessary measures to guarantee that all human rights defenders in Syria are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions.

Yours sincerely,

Evangelos TSOUROULIS

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'E. Tsouroulis', written in a cursive style.

CCBE President