

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

Brussels, 22 October 2014

Re: Concerns regarding the disappearance of Mr Khalil Ma'touq, a human rights lawyer

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 thirteen 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 concern over the situation of Mr Khalil Ma'touq, Director of the Syrian Center for Legal Studies and Research, who is a human rights lawyer and has defended activists for more than 20 years. On 2 October 2012, Mr Ma'touq and his colleague and assistant, Mohammed Zaza, were in route from Mr Ma'touq's home in the Damascus suburb of Sahanaya to his office in Damascus when they disappeared.

According to information that we have received, Mr Ma'touq and his assistant are being held by the Syrian authorities, who appear to move them among various detention facilities in Damascus, including the "Palestine Branch", a department of Syrian military intelligence. Their families and lawyers have repeatedly requested information about their fate, whereabouts and the opportunity to visit them. Despite these requests, Syrian authorities refuse to open an investigation on their location.

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

Principle 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, principle 17 says that:

Where the security of lawyers is threatened as a result of discharging their functions, they shall be adequately safeguarded by the authorities.

In view of the above, the CCBE respectfully urges you to investigate the reported detention of Mr Khalil Ma'touq, as well as to guarantee his security and physical and psychological integrity. In addition, the CCBE asks you to take all necessary measures to guarantee that all lawyers in Syria are able to perform their professional duties without fear of reprisal, hindrance, intimidation or harassment.

I look forward to hearing from your Excellency urgently.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Aldo Bulgarelli', with a long vertical line extending downwards from the end of the signature.

Aldo BULGARELLI
President