

Avocats Sans Frontières (ASF) rallies the cause of Mr. Muhannad al Hassani, a distinguished human rights defender, arrested by Syrian authorities owing to his action for human rights defence.

Mr. Muhannad al Hassani is a recognized human rights defender, he has been a member of the Damascus Bar Association and is the chairman of the Syrian human rights organization “*Swasiya*” – an organization that monitors and unveils human rights violations committed by Syrian authorities. On several occasions he acted as an observer in proceedings before the Supreme State Security Court and is known for his action in defence of the rights of political prisoners in Syria.

According to available information, Mr. Muhannad al Hassani was arrested by Syrian authorities on 28 July 2009 on the grounds that he “*offended national feelings*” and “*propagated false information*” – offences that could lead to a penalty of up to fifteen years of imprisonment. On 30 July 2009, Mr. Muhannad al Hassani was brought to the Damascus Law Courts, where he was interrogated in a hearing held *in camera* and without the possibility of being assisted by a lawyer. The date of Mr. Muhannad al Hassani’s trial remains to be set.

At the same time, Mr. Muhannad al Hassani is facing the risk of losing his right to practice as a defence lawyer by the disciplinary board of the Damascus Bar Association. Obviously, the reason for this does not seem to correspond to the need of ensuring discipline in the legal profession.

Before his arrest, Mr. Muhannad al Hassani had, on several occasions, been interrogated on his activities related to the defence of political detainees and on the activities of his organization. This seems to confirm the fact that his current detention is related to his professional activities in favour of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Available information leads us to believe that Mr. Muhannad al Hassani is the target of an arbitrary detention designed to intimidate and to dissuade him to carry on with his activities.

Therefore, Avocats Sans Frontières (ASF) insists on the fact that free exercise of the legal profession must be recognized and protected by the authorities in all circumstances. It is crucial that defense lawyer are allowed to practice their profession in all independence without restrictions and intimidations and that they aren’t threatened in any way nor are subjected to prosecutions because of their defense activities.

In reaction to the arrest of Mr. Muhannad al Hassani arrest, ASF has been seeking for a very large mobilisation of Bar associations in order to call to the Damascus and Syrian Bar Associations and to the highest Syrians authorities to put an end to prosecutions (to drop the charges) and refrain from any kind of harassment and intimidating measures against Mr. Muhannad al Hassani.

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