



World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT)
Tel.: 0041/22 809 49 39 / Fax: 0041/22 809 49 29
Email: omct@omct.org / Web: www.omct.org

EMBARGO: 11 October 2005 – 12h GMT

PRESS RELEASE

Syrian Human Rights Defender receives 2005 Martin Ennals Award

Geneva, October 11, 2005. Mr. **Aktham Naisse**, President of the Committees for the Defence of Democratic Liberties and Human Rights in Syria (CDF), is the winner of the 2005 Martin Ennals Award for Human Rights Defenders (MEA).

On Wednesday October 12, 2005, 17h00, Mr. Aktham Naisse will receive the award from the hands of Ms. Louise Arbour, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, during a ceremony at the Bâtiment des Forces Motrices in Geneva, within framework of the International North South Media Festival. The reception that follows the ceremony is co-sponsored by the Ville de Genève, the Canton de Genève, the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT), Human Rights First (HRF), International Alert (IA), and International Commission of Jurists (ICJ).

This event follows a long active campaign in favour of Mr. Aktham Naisse endorsed by OMCT in support of his work for democracy and human rights in Syria. In this regards, OMCT together with CDF has recently published a report on human rights in Syria submitted to the United Nations Human Rights Committee (HRC). This report will be presented to the public during the reception.

The Chairman of the Jury, Mr. Hans Thoolen, called Mr. Aktham Naisse “an extraordinary example of a man who continues to fight for fundamental rights in spite of constant harassment and threats”. Involved for over 30 years in the struggle in favour of democracy in Syria, he is one of the founding members of CDF, created in 1989, and the publication “Sawt al-Dimokratiyyah” (the Voice of Democracy). He was arrested six times for publicly demanding respect for human rights. Thus, Mr. Naisse was being charged since 2004 with “opposing the objectives of the revolution” and “disseminating false information aiming at weakening the State”, risking a prison sentence of 15 years. Thank to international pressure, he was finally acquitted on June 26, 2005 by the Supreme State Security Court¹.

A unique collaboration among eleven of the world’s leading non-governmental human rights organizations makes the **MEA the main award of the human rights movement**. The **jury** is composed of the following: Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, Human Rights First, International Federation for Human Rights, World Organisation Against Torture, International Commission of Jurists, German Diakonie, International Service for Human Rights, International Alert, HURIDOCS and DCI.

The **previous laureates** are: Lida Yusupova, Russia (2004); Alirio Uribe Muñoz, Colombia (2003); Jacqueline Moudeina, Chad (2002); Peace Brigades International (2001); Immaculée Birhaheka, DR Congo (2000); Natasa Kandic, Yugoslavia (1999); Eyad El Sarraj, Palestine (1998); Samuel Ruiz García, Mexico (1997); Clement Nwankwo, Nigeria (1996); Asma Jahangir, Pakistan (1995); Harry Wu, China (1994).

*For media contacts and general **information** on the MEA, please contact Luis Marreiros, Coordinator. Tel: +41.22.8094925 (marreiros@martinennalsaward.org) or visit our website: www.martinennalsaward.org*

¹ See Press releases of the Observatory for the protection of human rights defenders, a joint programme OMCT – FIDH (International federation for human rights).