



EURO-MEDITERRANEAN HUMAN RIGHTS NETWORK  
RÉSEAU EURO-MÉDITERRANÉEN DES DROITS DE L'HOMME  
الشبكة الأوروبية - المتوسطية لحقوق الإنسان



a joint programme



The Observatory  
for the Protection  
of Human Rights Defenders

## SYRIA: Human rights lawyer Haytham Al-Maleh pardoned and released

**Paris-Geneva-Copenhagen, March 9, 2011 – The Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders - a joint programme of the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) and the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT) and the Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network (EMHRN) welcome the presidential pardon in favour of Mr. Haytham Al-Maleh, an 80-year-old prominent Syrian human rights lawyer and former President of the Human Rights Association in Syria (HRAS). The latter was subsequently released on 8 March.**

Mr. **Haytham Al-Maleh** had been unlawfully arrested by officers of the General Intelligence Service on 14 October 2009. On 4 July 2010, the Second Military Court of Damascus sentenced him to three years of imprisonment for “*transferring false and exaggerated news that weaken national sentiments*”. His health status had deteriorated while in detention.

From February to July 2010, the Observatory and the EMHRN carried out in collaboration with the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ) a series of missions to Damascus to monitor the hearings in the trial against Haytham Al-Maleh. On the basis of these findings, the above-mentioned organisations have undertaken a comprehensive assessment of the fairness of the trial, and issued a joint trial observation report which demonstrates that the entire procedure was marred by human rights violations from the time of arrest, through detention, trial and conviction<sup>1</sup>.

“*We welcome the release of this prominent human rights defender, who has been detained over the past months for having merely criticised the continued use of the emergency laws in Syria and the ongoing control of the Syrian authorities over the judicial system*” FIDH President Souhayr Belhassen said today.

“*We nonetheless deplore his conviction as well as the ongoing arbitrary detention of a number of Syrian human rights defenders, all the more as we are aware that their conditions of detention often do not respect their human dignity*”, OMCT Secretary General Eric Sottas added.

“*We can however not forget that thousands of people remain arbitrarily detained in Syria after having been sentenced during unfair trials. The release of Mr. Al Maleh has to pave the way to the liberation of all people arbitrarily detained*”, stated EMHRN president Kamel Jendoubi.

Haytham Al Maleh is among a group of around 12 prisoners detained in the Damascus central prison of Adra who went on a hunger strike on March 7, 2011 to demand the end of political trials and detentions, as well as democratic reforms in the country. This group notably includes human rights defenders **Anwar Al Bunni**, **Habib Saleh**, **Ali Abdallah**, **Kamal Labwani** and **Kamal Cheikho** who currently remain detained for their peaceful commitment in favour of human rights.

Our organisations now call on the Syrian authorities to release all human rights defenders in Syria, and to ensure that they are able to carry out their human rights activities without any hindrance or intimidation, in accordance with the 1998 United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Defenders and other international human rights standards and instruments.

**For more information, please contact:**

**FIDH: Karine Appy / Arthur Manet, + 33 143552518**

**OMCT: Seynabou Benga/ Delphine Reculeau, + 41 22 809 49 39**

**EMHRN: Henriette Irminger Sonne, +45 30828337**

<sup>1</sup>

The report can be accessed at:

- FIDH : [http://www.fidh.org/IMG/pdf/OBS\\_Syria\\_TrialObservation\\_Report\\_eng.pdf](http://www.fidh.org/IMG/pdf/OBS_Syria_TrialObservation_Report_eng.pdf)

- OMCT: [Report - Trial of Haytham Al-Maleh](#)

- EMHRN: <http://www.euromedrights.org/index.php?news=9283>