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SYRIA: ICJ CONDEMNS UNFAIR TRIAL OF LAWYER

The ICJ's Centre for the Independence of Judges and Lawyers (ICJ/CIJL) said today that the trial of Syrian lawyer and human rights activist Akhtam Naisse is deeply flawed. "This trial is further proof of the Syrian Government's complete disregard for freedom of expression and fair trial standards," said Nicholas Howen, ICJ Secretary General.

Mr. Naisse was tried on 26 July at the Supreme State Security Court (SSSC), a tribunal that is neither independent nor impartial as it falls under the authority of the National Security Office of the ruling Ba'ath Party. The SSSC also includes a military judge, does not apply regular criminal procedures and its rulings are not subject to appeal.

"The sole purpose of this trial is to rubberstamp the Government's decision to silence Mr. Naisse for exercising his right to freedom of expression," said Nicholas Howen, ICJ Secretary-General. "The conditions under which he is being tried make a mockery of justice," he added.

Mr. Naisse has been charged with "opposing the objectives of the revolution", "disseminating false information aimed at weakening the State" and "affiliating with international organisations". Although the latter charge was dropped after a presidential amnesty, Mr. Naisse still faces up to 15 years in prison. A very limited number of international observers, including Mr. Mokhtar Trifi, the president of the Tunisian League for Human Rights, an ICJ affiliated organisation, were allowed into the courtroom during Mr. Naisse's trial. Representatives from EU member States and the US were banned from entering the court.

Mr. Naisse, who is in poor health, has been kept in solitary detention since 13 April, when he was arrested pursuant to the publication of a report in which the Committees for the Defence of Democratic Freedoms and Human Rights (CDF), the organisation over which he presides, denounced human rights violations against the Kurdish minority. Mr. Naisse has repeatedly spoken out against human rights violations and has actively campaigned for the lifting of the 40-year state of emergency.

On 28 April, the ICJ/CIJL wrote to President Assad of Syria urging him immediately to release Mr. Naisse and to bring Syria's legislation in line with international standards on freedom of expression.

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The ICJ is an international non-governmental organisation comprising sixty of the world's most eminent jurists and has a worldwide network of national sections and affiliated organisations

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