

The Observatory

for the Protection
of Human Rights Defenders

a joint programme



Euro-Mediterranean
Human Rights
Network (EMHRN)



INTERNATIONAL
COMMISSION
OF JURISTS

Press Release

Harassment through politically motivated trial

Trial against Syrian Human Rights Defender Aktham Naisse continues on 26 June

Copenhagen – Geneva – Paris, June 23, 2005. On 26 June the trial against Syrian human rights defender **Aktham Naisse** is scheduled to resume before the Supreme State Security Court (SSSC) in Damascus. Mr. Naisse is a prominent Syrian lawyer and the President of the Committees of the Defence of Democratic Liberties and Human Rights in Syria (CDF), a member organisation of the EMHRN, FIDH and OMCT. He has been awarded the Martin Ennals Award this year for his human rights work.

The Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network (EMHRN), the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ) and 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), recall that the state of emergency that has been in effect in Syria since 1963 is not consistent with international standards on states of emergency, in particular with art. 4 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).

The Syrian Supreme State Security Court (SSSC) established as an exceptional court by decree 47 of 1968 pursuant to the state of emergency does not meet the minimum international standards on the independence and impartiality of tribunals and its rules of procedure do not conform to internationally recognised standards of a fair trial. In addition, such a trial is a flagrant violation of everyone's right to be tried by ordinary courts or tribunals using established legal procedures.

Mr. Naisse was arrested on April 13, 2004, his trial before the SSSC started on July 26, 2004. On August 17, 2004, he was released on bail following a decision by the SSSC. Mr. Naisse remains charged with "opposing the objectives of the revolution" and "disseminating false information aiming at weakening the State", thereby risking a prison sentence of 15 years. International human rights organisations have consistently condemned such a trial aiming at silencing Mr, Naisse for peacefully exercising his right to freedom of expression.

The EMHRN, the ICJ and the Observatory call upon:

The Syrian authorities:

- to ensure that Mr. Aktham Naisse be brought before a civil, competent and impartial tribunal, and that his procedural rights be guaranteed at all times, including the right of defense and the right of appeal;
- to ensure that all charges against Mr. Naisse be dropped, as the peaceful exercise of freedom of expression cannot be criminalised;
- to bring Syria's legislation in line with international standards on freedom of expression and on fair trial.

The European Union and its Member States:

- to demand that Syria respects international human rights law, particularly as the EU is expected soon to sign an Association Agreement with Syria.

The international community:

- to continue expressing concern about the situation of human rights defenders and human rights organisations in Syria, and to continue supporting them.

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