



INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION OF JURISTS

Commission internationale de juristes - Comisión Internacional de Juristas

" dedicated since 1952 to the primacy, coherence and implementation of international law and principles that advance human rights "

COMMUNIQUE DE PRESSE – COMUNICADO DE PRENSA

For immediate release

Geneva 23 Mai, 2007

P
R
E
S
S
E
R
E
L
E
A
S
E

SYRIA – ICJ CALLS FOR IMMEDIATE AND UNCONDITIONAL RELEASE OF HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

The International Commission of Jurists (ICJ) expressed today its profound concerns about the flawed trials of the Syrian lawyers and human rights defenders Kamal Labwani, Anwar Al-Bunni, Michel Kilo and Mahmud Issa.

Kamal Labawani was convicted of "scheming with a foreign country" and "encouraging attack against Syria", and sentenced on Thursday 10 May to 12 years in prison. Three days later, Michel Kilo and Mahmud Issa were sentenced to three years for "weakening national sentiment" and "spreading false information harmful to the state". Anwar Al-Bunni was also sentenced to five years imprisonment for the same charges on 24 April. "The charges against the four human rights defenders disregard the Syrian Constitution and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Syria is a state party", said the ICJ. The two instruments guarantee the right of everyone "to freely and openly express his views through all means of expression" and "to hold opinions without interference", the ICJ added.

The four human rights defenders were arrested in the Syrian capital in May 2006 after signing the "Damascus Declaration", an appeal calling for changes to Syrian foreign policy regarding neighbouring Lebanon. "These trials silence the four human rights defenders after they exercised their right to freedom of expression," said the ICJ. "These trials again demonstrate the Syrian Government's policy of severely limiting the exercise of the right to freedom of expression", said the ICJ.

The ICJ calls upon the Syrian authorities to release immediately and unconditionally the four human rights defenders and urges them to take necessary steps to ensure their security. Prison guards reportedly beat Anwar Al-Bunni and forcibly shaved his hair. The three other human rights defenders have been reportedly kept in poor conditions during their detention, at times without adequate bedding or beds. The ICJ calls on the Syrian Government to treat the detainees in accordance with international standards while they are being detained.

The ICJ urges the Syrian authorities to guarantee the right of human rights lawyers and human rights defenders to freely carry out their legitimate work without intimidation, hindrance or harassment.

For more information, please contact Saïd Benarbia, Middle East & North Africa Legal Officer, at + 41 22 979 38 17

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

33, rue des Bains, P.O. Box 91, 1211 Geneva 8, Switzerland
Tel: +41(0) 22 979 3800 – Fax: +41(0) 22 979 3801 – Website: <http://www.icj.org> - E-mail: info@icj.org