

Human Rights Commissioner Strässer on the disappearance of Bassel Khartabil in Syria

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27.11.2015 - Press release 

Christoph Strässer, the Federal Government Commissioner for Human Rights Policy and Humanitarian Aid at the Federal Foreign Office, issued the following statement today (27 November) on the disappearance of Bassel Khartabil in Syria:

Tens of thousands of journalists, human rights defenders and opposition members are being arbitrarily detained in Syrian detention centres and prisons and made to suffer torture and atrocious prison conditions. Thousands of these prisoners fall victim to involuntary disappearance.

I am alarmed by the fate of the peaceful activist Bassel Khartabil Safadi, a defender of the right to freedom of expression, who was arrested in Damascus in March 2012. Current reports according to which he has been transferred from the central prison in Adra to an unknown location and possibly sentenced to death by a military court fill me with great concern.

I call on the Syrian authorities to declare the whereabouts of Bassel Khartabil Safadi and to release him. In the case of a sentence to death, its enforcement must be suspended and the sentence lifted immediately.

This case is exemplary of the arbitrary imprisonment and disappearance of countless Syrians, including the lawyer Khalil Maatouk, author Hussein Eisso and Syrian chess champion Dr Rania al-Abbasi along with her husband and six children, as well as the opposition politicians Dr Abdulaziz al-Khayyer, Maher Tahhan and Eyas Ayash.

I call on the Syrian Government to put an end to its practice of involuntary disappearance, to declare the whereabouts of those affected and to release all arbitrarily detained persons.

Background:

Born and raised in Syria, the Palestinian Bassel Khartabil Safadi is one of the leading figures of Syria's Internet scene. He was arrested by the Syrian military intelligence service in Damascus on 15 March 2012 and tried before a military court in December 2012. He was subsequently detained at the Adra prison in Damascus until being transferred to an unknown location on 3 October.

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