

**President Bashar al-Assad
Presidential Palace
al-Rashid Street
Damascus
Syrian Arab Republic**

Brussels, 15 April 2014

Re: Concerns regarding the death of Mr Maen Al-Ghoneimi, a human rights lawyer

Your Excellency,

I am writing to you on behalf of the Council of Bars and Law Societies of Europe (CCBE), which, through the national Bars and Law Societies of the Member States of the European Union and the European Economic Area, represents more than 1 million European lawyers. In addition to membership from EU bars, it also has observer representatives from a further twelve European countries' bars.

The CCBE, through its Human Rights Committee, places great emphasis on respect for human rights and the rule of law. The CCBE is particularly concerned by the situation of human rights defenders in the world.

The CCBE express its deep concern over information that we have received about Mr Maen Al-Ghoneimi, a human rights defender and lawyer. On 26 March 2014, the family of Mr Al-Ghoneimi was notified by the Damascus Military Police that Mr Al-Ghoneimi died in detention on 14 January 2014. The police declared that he had died of heart failure and provided his personal possessions to his family, but have thus far refused to disclose his burial location.

Mr Maen Al-Ghoneimi was a human rights lawyer and a member of the Lawyers' Syndicate in Damascus. He was an active participant in lawyers' peaceful protests and sit-ins, and provided legal aid to internally displaced people in Syria.

The CCBE was recently informed that Mr Al-Ghoneimi was arrested on 20 May 2013 without any charges brought against him and then detained incommunicado until his family received notification of his death. Mr Al-Ghoneimi's family stated that he was in good health at the time of the arrest, and therefore believes that he may have been tortured or denied medical treatment while in detention.

The CCBE condemns the arbitrary arrest and incommunicado detention of Mr Al-Ghoneimi, and holds the Syrian authorities directly accountable for his death while in prison.

In this context, the CCBE wishes to draw to your attention the following Articles of the United Nations Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers (1990):

Article 16 states that:

Governments shall ensure that lawyers (a) are able to perform all of their professional functions without intimidation, hindrance, harassment or improper interference; (b) are able to travel and to consult with their clients freely both within their own country and abroad; and (c) shall not suffer, or be

threatened with, prosecution or administrative, economics or other sanctions for any action taken in accordance with recognized professional duties, standards and ethics.

Moreover Article 17 states that:

Where the security of lawyers is threatened as a result of discharging their functions, they shall be adequately safeguarded by the authorities.

In view of the above, the CCBE respectfully urges your Excellency to condemn the arbitrary arrest and detention of Mr Maen Al-Ghoneimi, and to carry out a thorough, impartial and immediate investigation into his death. The CCBE also asks you to take all necessary measures to guarantee in all circumstances that lawyers in Syria are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisal and restrictions.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Aldo Bulgarelli', with a long vertical line extending downwards from the end of the signature.

Aldo BULGARELLI
President