

PRESS RELEASE - THE OBSERVATORY

ISRAEL: Mr. Ameer Makhoul denies all charges after being subjected to physical and psychological ill-treatment

Geneva-Paris, June 4, 2010. *The Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, a joint programme of the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT) and the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), condemns the criminal proceedings launched against Mr. Ameer Makhoul, General Director of Ittijah - the Union of Arab Community-Based Associations, and Chairman of the Popular Committee for the Defence of Political Freedoms in the framework of the High Follow-up Committee for the Arab Citizens of Israel.*

On May 27, 2010, the indictment against Mr. **Ameer Makhoul** was submitted before the Haifa District Court. Mr. Makhoul, a Palestinian Arab citizen of Israel, was charged with “assistance to the enemy in a time of war”, “conspiracy to assist an enemy”, “aggravated espionage”, and “contact with a foreign agent”, charges that he vehemently denies. Mr. Ameer Makhoul has been transferred from the General Security Service (GSS) detention centre to the Gilboa Prison in Israel, a centre run by the Israeli Prison Service. The next hearing on his case is scheduled for June 21, 2010.

The Observatory recalls that Mr. Ameer Makhoul was arrested on May 6, 2010. He was then held in incommunicado detention and denied all fundamental due process rights, including access to his lawyer, until May 17, 2010. The court hearing that took place on that date was the first time Mr. Makhoul was granted access to his lawyers. Previously, he was brought before a judge alone, and was not allowed to be present at court hearings attended by his lawyers. On one occasion his wife was forcibly removed from the hearing for “obstructing the proceedings”.

During his initial 11 day incommunicado detention and interrogation period Mr. Makhoul was reportedly subjected to harsh interrogation methods by the GSS, which caused him both psychological and physical harm. As a result, he would have admitted, under extreme duress, to false allegations made by the GSS interrogators regarding acts he did not commit. These illegal methods of interrogation included protracted sleep deprivation and continuous interrogation, while being shackled tightly to an under-sized chair that was bolted to the floor to prevent it from moving. His hands were also cuffed to the back of the chair in a way that stretched his arms and shoulders sharply backward. His legs were folded backwards flanking the chair, with his knees turned toward the floor. When, after hours of being bound in this stress position while under intense interrogation, Mr. Makhoul complained of being in excruciating pain, the GSS interrogators proceeded to cuff his legs to the chair. They also threatened that he would be permanently crippled from the interrogation.

The Observatory expresses its serious concern for Mr. Makhoul’s physical and psychological well-being. Furthermore, the Observatory calls upon Israel to uphold Mr. Makhoul’s fundamental rights in detention, and to afford Mr. Makhoul his right to a fair trial. Mr. Makhoul’s arrest takes place in a context of an escalating campaign against human rights defenders in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

More generally, the Observatory calls upon Israel to conform in all circumstances with the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as well as international human rights instruments ratified by Israel.

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