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Press Release from the Commission of Inquiry on Syria (release of human rights defenders) - 14 August 2015

Geneva, 14 August 2015 –The Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic welcomes the news of the release from Syrian Government custody of Hussein Ghreer and Hani Al-Zaytani in mid-July 2015 and of Mazen Darwish on 10 August 2015. “The release of the three human rights defenders is something to be welcomed. In Syria, where a culture of impunity has taken hold, such good news is all too rare,” stated Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro, Chair of the Commission.

Ghreer, Al-Zaytani, and Darwish had been imprisoned by the Syrian Government since February 2012, following their arrest at their workplace, the Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression. In March 2014, the three men were charged with “publicizing terrorist acts” and “promoting terrorist activities” under Article 8 of the Syria’s 2012 Counter-Terrorism legislation. Their trials have been repeatedly adjourned, without explanation. The Commission notes that the charges against the three men remain, as does the spectre of further imprisonment.

Many of those detained under Article 8, which prescribes imprisonment and forced labour for a variety of vaguely defined terrorism-related offenses that include distributing written materials or information, are human rights defenders and peace activists.

“We repeat our call upon the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic to allow an impartial, neutral and independent organization regular access to the thousands of persons reportedly in detention in the country,” Pinheiro said. “Many of these detainees have been held for long periods without charge or without trial, and are often not permitted contact with their families or their lawyers.”

The commissioners are Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro (Chair), Karen Koning AbuZayd, Vitit Muntarbhorn and Carla Del Ponte.

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