



The Law Society of
Upper Canada

Barreau
du Haut-Canada

February 4, 2016

Minister of Justice of the Syrian Arab Republic
Mr. Najm Hamad al-Ahmad
Al-Nasr Street
Damascus
Syrian Arab Republic

Office of the Treasurer

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DELIVERED BY EMAIL TO: moj@net.sy

Dear Minister:

Re: Persecution of human rights lawyer Razan Zaitouneh

I write on behalf of the Law Society of Upper Canada* to voice our grave concern over the persecution of human rights lawyer Razan Zaitouneh. When serious issues of apparent injustice to lawyers and the judiciary come to our attention, we speak out.

Razan Zaitouneh is a prominent human rights lawyer who has won several awards for her human rights work, including the 2013 International Women of Courage Award and the 2011 Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought. She largely defends political prisoners. Razan Zaitouneh is a co-founder of both the Violations Documentation Centre (VDC) and the Local Development and Small Projects Support (LDSPS).

On 9 December 2013, Razan Zaitouneh, along with her husband, Wa'el Hamada, and two colleagues, Nazem Hamadi and Samira Khalil, were abducted by unknown individuals from a joint office of the VDC and the LDSPS in the Damascus suburb of Douma. In the months prior to her abduction, Razan Zaitouneh had received threats from at least one armed opposition group in Eastern Ghouta. Reports indicate that the abduction of Razan Zaitouneh and her colleagues is linked to their human rights work.

Razan Zaitouneh's whereabouts are still unknown. December 2015 marked the second anniversary of her abduction.

The Law Society of Upper Canada urges the government of Syria to comply with Articles 16 and 23 of the United Nations' *Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers*.

Article 16 states:

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, economic or other sanctions for any action taken in accordance with recognized professional duties, standards and ethics.

Moreover, Article 23 states:

Lawyers like other citizens are entitled to freedom of expression, belief, association and assembly. In particular, they shall have the right to take part in public discussion of matters concerning the law, the administration of justice and the promotion and protection of human rights and to join or form local, national or international organizations and attend their meetings, without suffering professional restrictions by reason of their lawful action or their membership in a lawful organization.

The Law Society urges the government of Syria to:

- a. locate Razan Zaitouneh and ensure that she is released immediately;
- b. put an end to all acts of harassment and intimidation against human rights lawyers and defenders in Syria;

- c. guarantee in all circumstances the physical and psychological safety and integrity of Razan Zaitouneh;
- d. ensure in all circumstances respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms in accordance with international human rights standards and international instruments.

Yours very truly,

Janet E. Minor
Treasurer

**The Law Society of Upper Canada is the governing body for more than 49,000 lawyers and 7,400 paralegals in the province of Ontario, Canada. The Treasurer is the head of the Law Society.*

The mandate of the Law Society is to govern the legal profession in the public interest by upholding the independence, integrity and honour of the legal profession for the purpose of advancing the cause of justice and the rule of law.

cc:

Alex Neve, Secretary General, Amnesty International Canada

Mary Lawlor, Executive Director, Front Line Defenders

Vincent Forest, Head of European Union Office, Front Line Defenders

Kenneth Roth, Executive Director, Human Rights Watch

Adrie van de Streek, Executive Director, Lawyers for Lawyers

David F. Sutherland, Chair, Lawyers' Rights Watch Canada

Yves Berthelot, President, Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders

Michel Forst, Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

Gabriela Knaul, Special Rapporteur of the Human Council on the independence of judges and lawyers, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

Sarah Smith, Human Rights and Rule of Law Policy Adviser, The Law Society of England and Wales