



Itijah General Director Ameer Makhoul sentenced to 9 years in prison: Addameer calls for an end to arbitrary detention and the release of all human rights defenders

[RAMALLAH, 30 January 2011] Addameer Prisoner Support and Human Rights Association condemns the sentencing of human rights defender Ameer Makhoul to nine years in prison and one year suspended sentence. The sentence was handed down on Sunday 30 January at the District Court in Haifa. Mr. Makhoul is a prominent political activist and serves as the general director of Ittijah – The Union of Arab Community-Based Associations and as the Chairman of the Public Committee for the Defense of Political Freedom in the framework of the High Follow-up Committee for the Arab Citizens of Israel. He is currently detained at Gilboa prison in southern Israel.

Mr. Makhoul was arrested at his home in the early morning hours of 6 May 2010, two weeks after a travel ban was imposed on him by the Israeli Ministry of Interior. He was held incommunicado for two weeks whilst he was subjected to intensive interrogation. On 27 May, Mr. Makhoul was charged with espionage, assistance to the enemy in a time of war - which carries a maximum sentence of life imprisonment - contact with a foreign agent, and other security charges. Mr. Makhoul vehemently denies the charges against him, and has stated before the Magistrate's court in Petah Tikva that he made a confession as a result of the harsh interrogation methods used against him. On 27 October 2010, Mr. Makhoul accepted a plea bargain, pleading guilty to espionage, aggravated espionage, contact with a foreign agent and conspiracy to aid the enemy in time of war. In exchange, the prosecution dropped the charges of assistance to the enemy in a time of war, the most serious charge against Mr. Makhoul, which would have carried a life sentence. This highlights the pressure he was under to enter into the plea bargain and have his sentence reduced. In the event, the nine years of imprisonment imposed on Mr. Makhoul almost reaches the maximum sentence normally given for plea bargains - ten years - and rejects requests made by his legal defense for a lesser sentence of seven years.

Addameer condemns the harsh sentence imposed on Mr. Makhoul, and views it as part of a wider campaign by the Israeli authorities to silence all human rights defenders who speak out against Israeli human rights violations. In addition to arbitrary arrest and detention, Israeli authorities have met Palestinian human rights activism in recent years with a variety of measures, including raids, deportations, travel bans, visa denials and media attacks against NGOs. Moreover, Palestinian communities involved in grassroots human rights defense efforts are frequently levied with collective punishment measures in the form of curfews, sieges, and destruction of property, threats to individuals and the community as a whole, beatings, the use of lethal and "non-lethal" ammunition, including 40mm high velocity tear gas canisters, denial of permits, tear-gassing, army incursions and intentional injury and killings.

Addameer views Mr. Makhoul's imprisonment as a deliberate violation of his fundamental freedoms and special protections provided under international law for human rights defenders, particularly freedoms of movement, expression, association and non-violent assembly. Furthermore, as the charges against Mr. Makhoul and his subsequent sentencing are based on what he maintains was a forced confession, Addameer considers the conduct of Mr. Makhoul's trial to be in violation of fundamental due process principles and human rights standards.

Addameer thus urges foreign government officials, including members of foreign representative offices to the Palestinian Authority in Ramallah and foreign Consulates in East Jerusalem, as well as representatives of the European Commission and the European Parliament, human rights organizations and United Nations bodies to:

- Demand Mr. Makhoul's immediate release and the removal of all charges against him;
- Raise Mr. Makhoul's case in their official meetings with Israeli officials;
- Pressure Israel to put an end to its policy of arbitrary detention and deportation of human rights defenders

For more information on the Israeli campaign of repression against Palestinian human rights defenders, please visit our website: www.addameer.info or contact us directly:

Addameer Prisoner Support and Human Rights Association

Tel: +972 (0)2 296 0446 / 297 0136

Fax: +972 (0)2 296 0447

Email: info@addameer.ps

Website: www.addameer.info

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