

Human Rights Commissioner on the anniversary of the abduction of Razan Zaitouneh and her colleagues in Douma, Syria

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09.12.2014 - Press release 

Statement by the Federal Government Commissioner for Human Rights Policy and Humanitarian Aid, Christoph Strässer, on the anniversary of the abduction of Razan Zaitouneh and her colleagues in Douma, Syria

On 9 December 2013, the Syrian lawyer and human rights defender Razan Zaitouneh and her colleagues Wa'el Hamada, Samira Khalil and Nazem Hamadi were abducted in Douma, a suburb of Damascus. Their whereabouts remain unknown to this day.

Despite a plea from the families of the abducted activists in April this year, the parties to the conflict have unfortunately not done anything so far to help shed light on the case. Razan Zaitouneh and her colleagues had campaigned for many years for the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms in Syria. They are symbols of peaceful resistance against oppression and violence who documented human rights abuses and war crimes by all parties to the conflict in Syria in their work.

I call on the relevant actors and parties to the conflict to do everything in their power to ensure the safety of the four abducted activists and to facilitate their release.

Background information:

On 9 December 2013, the lawyer and human rights defender Razan Zaitouneh, her husband Wa'el Hamada, the activist Samira Khalil and the lawyer Nazem Hamadi were abducted from the office of their human rights organisations, Violations Documentation Center (VDC) and Local Development and Small Projects Support (LDSPS), in Douma, a suburb of Damascus. According to VDC, an unidentified armed group stormed the office,

confiscated laptops and documents, and abducted the four activists. Since then, there has been no information on their state of health or whereabouts. No group has claimed responsibility for the abductions.

In the months leading up to her abduction, Razan Zaitouneh received several threats from local armed groups. Through their work in VDC, Zaitouneh and her team documented human rights abuses both by the Syrian military and security forces, as well as by armed opposition groups.

In April 2014, Zaitouneh's family issued a statement in which they called on Zahran Alloush, the leader of what was then the dominant armed group (Jaysh al-Islam) in Douma, to help shed light on the fate of the abducted activists. Forty-five human rights organisations, including Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and Reporters without Borders, subsequently signed a statement calling for Razan Zaitouneh's release.

Info

Zaitouneh represented victims of political persecution in Syria before the outbreak of the conflict in the country. Along with other activists, she founded the Local Coordination Committees in Damascus in the spring of 2011. Wa'el Hamada was arrested by the Syrian regime in May 2011. From that time on, Razan Zaitouneh was forced to continue her work from the underground. However, she maintained an international presence via Skype and by writing articles for the media. Razan Zaitouneh has received a number of awards, including the Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought from the European Parliament in 2011.

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