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Statement by the spokesperson of High Representative Catherine Ashton condemning the arrest of Mazen Darwish, the head of the Syrian Centre for Media and Freedom of Expression

The spokesperson of Catherine Ashton, High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice President of the Commission, issued the following statement today:

"The High Representative deplores the arrest on Thursday by Syrian security forces of human rights defender Mazen Darwish, the head of the Damascus-based 'Syrian Centre for Media and Freedom of Expression', as well as at least 12 other human rights defenders, including blogger Razan Gazzawi, and the wife of Mazen Darwish. The EU stresses the need to respect the freedom of expression and the freedom of human rights defenders to carry out their work, in line with Syria's international obligations.

The High Representative expresses her concern for the physical safety of Mr. Darwish and others arrested, and demands information about their whereabouts and access for their families. She calls on the Syrian authorities to immediately release Mr Darwish and all those human rights defenders arrested on Thursday, and to release all political prisoners in accordance with Syria's commitments to the Arab League to end violence.

The High Representative strongly condemns the level of violence in recent weeks committed against civilians by the indiscriminate bombardment of residential districts in Homs, Zabadai, Hama and Deraa. The violence has reached unspeakable levels of criminality and destruction."

P R E S S

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