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Statement by the Spokesperson of the EU High Representative on the disappearance of political opposition figure Abdel Azeez el-Khair and human rights defender Khalil Maatouk in Syria

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

"The High Representative is deeply concerned at the disappearance of Dr Abdel Azeez el-Khair while leaving Damascus airport shortly after his return on 20 September from discussions in Beijing. Dr el-Khair is a senior figure within the Syrian opposition movement National Coordinating Committee, active in working towards peaceful political dialogue and transition in Syria. Dr el-Khair has chosen to pursue the path of peaceful change by remaining in Syria and working among Syrians. The High Representative calls on those responsible for his detention to release him and the two colleagues detained with him as soon as possible, to the safety of their families and friends.

The High Representative has also learned of the detention on 2 October of Khalil Maatouk, a prominent Syrian human rights activist and lawyer, while leaving his home in Damascus, and calls for his immediate release.

P R E S S

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The level of violence and human suffering grows daily in Syria, and must be brought to an immediate halt. It is vital for peace that those working for non-violent political transition and the defence of human rights be allowed to work without threat or harassment, and that all those detained are freed without delay.

The High Representative calls for all those responsible for human rights violations to be held accountable. She welcomes the recent reinforcement of the Independent Commission of Inquiry and reiterates her full support to the Commission."