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Statement by the High Representative, Catherine Ashton, on the release in Syria of Mr Al Maleh and the sentencing of Mr. Ali Al-Abdullah

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

"The release of Haitham al Maleh on 8 March 2011 is a positive first step that I hope will be followed by the full restoration of his civil rights, including the right to travel freely outside Syria and return.

I reiterate my call on the Government of Syria to reconsider all cases of prisoners of conscience, including the case of Mr. Al Hassani in accordance with its national Constitution and its international commitments and to immediately release all such prisoners and fully restore their civil rights. In this regard the EU expresses deep concerns about the sentencing, on 13 March, of Mr. Ali Al-Abdullah to one and a half years in prison by the Military Court, after completing his previous sentence.

Syria must abide by the international commitments it freely entered into, in particular under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which guarantees freedom of opinion and of expression and the right to a fair trial."

P R E S S

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