

CONCEPT NOTE

PANEL DISCUSSION ON ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCE IN SYRIA

SUMMARY:

The Permanent Mission of Germany, in cooperation with Amnesty International is organizing a panel discussion on the human rights situation in Syria with particular focus on enforced disappearances and detention conditions, including torture and other ill-treatment. Leading Syrian human rights defenders will participate as speakers, together with international experts on the situation in the country. The main objective of the panel is to raise awareness among the United Nations diplomatic community about the tens of thousands of people who have been forcibly disappeared by the Syrian government since 2011 and its use of this practice as a widespread, as well as systematic attack against the civilian population – amounting to crimes against humanity.

PARTICIPANTS:

- *Hussein Ghrer* (Blogger and human rights activist)
- *Raneem Maatouk* (Human rights activist)
- *Nicolette Boehland* (Syria researcher, Amnesty International)
- *Bernard Duhaime* (Vice-Chairperson, UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances)

Hussein Ghrer studied at Damascus University and graduated as an IT engineer in 2004. He began blogging in 2007. He wrote about corruption, politics, and the rights of women and people with disabilities. He was honored in 2011 by Afaq el-Rouh Organization for Disabled Women for his essential participation in a project to integrate children with disabilities into kindergartens.

Hussein Ghrer also worked as a citizen journalist trainer at the BBC's World Service Trust between 2010 and 2011 and was detained by the Syrian authorities as result of this work between 24 October and 1 December 2011. Following his release, he began working with the Syrian Centre for Media and Freedom of Expression, a Syrian NGO documenting human rights violations in Syria, until he was detained again by the Syrian authorities in February 2012. He was released in July 2015.

Raneem Maatouk is a human rights activist from Damascus. She worked with the Local Coordination Committees together with human rights lawyer Razan Zeitounh and participated in the organization of peaceful student demonstrations calling for government changes. She provided humanitarian assistance to persons displaced by the conflict and documented human rights violations. She studied Fine Arts at the Arab International University but was unable to graduate due to being arrested and forcibly disappeared by the Syrian authorities in February 2014. She was released in June 2014.

Nicolette Boehland is a researcher for Amnesty International's Syria team, based in Beirut, Lebanon. Previously, she was a Harvard Law Fellow at the Center for Civilians in Conflict (CIVIC), where she led a study on civilian involvement in war and conducted fieldwork for case studies on Bosnia, Libya, Gaza, and Somalia; a legal fellow at the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission in Kabul; a program manager for Save the Children in the West Bank and Gaza; a Fulbright scholar in Jordan, where she worked with CARE International to coordinate resources for Iraqi refugees; and a senior associate in the legal and policy office at Human Rights Watch. Nicolette Boehland has a bachelor's degree in international affairs and English literature from Lewis & Clark College and a law degree from Harvard Law School.

Bernard Duhaime is Professor at the Law Department in the Faculty of Law and Political Science at the University of Quebec in Montreal (UQAM, in Canada), where he is also the Director International Relations and International Law Program. Bernard Duhaime has published extensively on international human rights law issues and is a

member of several research centres in Canada. He has been involved in the defense and promotion of human rights since 1996, both in national and international human rights agencies, including as a staff attorney of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights of the Organization of American States. Bernard Duhaime has advised many human rights and indigenous peoples' organizations, human rights defenders and attorneys, as well as intergovernmental organizations and States. He has represented or assisted victims and human rights defenders before the Inter-American and the European human rights systems as well as UN specialized agencies and mechanisms. Bernard Duhaime has studied law at McGill University in Canada as well as at Notre Dame University in the United States and is a member of the Quebec Bar in Canada.