



CALL FOR RELEASE OF CIVIL SOCIETY LEADER ON 4TH ANNIVERSARY BEHIND BARS

6 May 2014 – The global civil society alliance, CIVICUS, and several NGO networks are calling for the release of the imprisoned Palestinian civil society leader, Ameer Makhoul, on the 4th anniversary of his arrest.

“Ameer Makhoul has unjustly spent years in prison as a result of his legitimate and peaceful activities as a human rights defender,” said Mandeep Tiwana, Head of Policy and Research at CIVICUS. “His trial and conviction were marred by a number of flaws and inconsistencies and we are calling on the Israeli government to release him immediately.”

On 6 May 2010, Ameer Makhoul, Director of the Palestinian NGO, Ittijah: Union of Arab Community-Based Associations, was arrested by Israeli Shin Bet security forces in Haifa, Israel. Following his arrest, Mr Makhoul was denied access to legal counsel and his family for nearly two weeks, during which he was reportedly forced to make a confession under severe duress.

At the time of his arrest, the Shin Bet forces confiscated documents, personal family mobile phones, laptops and hard drives from computers from his home. The same evening the Ittijah office was raided and ransacked, culminating in the confiscation of documents and computers.

From 6 - 27 May 2010, a sweeping gag was issued in the form of a court order prohibiting any media outlet, civil society group or individual from publishing any piece of information related to the case. Moreover, the court instructed all outlets that had already published information about the case to immediately retract such information.

Mr Makhoul was charged with “assistance to the enemy in a time of war,” “aggravated espionage” and “contact with a foreign agent.” The charges, however, are widely considered to be politically motivated. On 30 January 2011 Mr Makhoul was sentenced to nine years in prison with an additional two year suspended sentence and has been serving his term at the Israeli Prison in Gilboa.

“Ameer Makhoul is yet another victim of the Israeli government’s unrelenting campaign to muzzle Palestinian human rights defenders peacefully advocating for genuine human rights reform in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories,” said Amjad Shawa, Director of the Palestinian Non-Governmental Organization Network (PNGO). “Israeli authorities must abandon their practice of arresting and detaining activists. Rather they should engage in substantive and pluralistic dialogue with a cross section of civil society.”

The Arab Association for Human Rights (HRA), the Arab NGO Network for Development (ANND), Baladna: Association for Arab Youth, CIVICUS and the Palestinian Non-Governmental Organization Network urge Israeli authorities to immediately and unconditionally release Ameer Mahkoul.

Further, in light of the restrictive climate in which Palestinian activists are forced to operate, the above-mentioned organisations urge Israeli authorities to: (i) unconditionally release Ameer Makhoul and all activists in detention as a result of their civil society work, (ii) guarantee the safety of civil society activists and their organisations and (iii) refrain from further harassment of individuals involved in the peaceful exercise of their rights to express, associate and assemble.

ENDS

Notes to editors:

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CIVICUS is an international network of civil society organisations and activists working to strengthen citizen action and civil society around the world.

The Arab Association for Human Rights (HRA) was founded in 1988 by lawyers and community activists. HRA is an independent, grassroots, non-governmental organization working to promote and protect the political, civil, economic and cultural rights of the Palestinian Arab minority in Israel from an international human rights perspective.

The Palestinian Non-Governmental Organization Network (PNGO) is a coordination body for the NGO sector in Palestine with the purpose of strengthening the Palestinian civil society

and contributing to the establishment of the Palestinian state based on the principles of democracy, social justice, rule of law, tolerance, and respect of human rights.

The Arab NGO Network for Development (ANND) is a regional network, working in 12 Arab countries with nine national networks (with an extended membership of 250 CSOs from different backgrounds) and 23 NGO members. ANND aims at strengthening the role of civil society, enhancing the values of democracy, respect of human rights and sustainable development in the region.

Baladna, Association for Arab Youth, a developmental and capacity building agency for Arab-Palestinian youth in Israel, was established in 2001 by a group of ten educators, artists, lawyers, community workers, feminist activists and journalists representing a new generation of Palestinian citizens of Israel. Baladna aspires to provide the ideas, resources, and practical tools for youth activism in the Arab community in Israel, at the same time offering Arab youth a non-partisan, comfortable forum in which to nurture individual and collective identity.