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FREEDOM NOW

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### UNITED NATIONS DECLARES SYRIA'S DETENTION OF HAITHAM AL-MALEH A VIOLATION OF INTERNATIONAL LAW, CALLS FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention publicly released its opinion that the Government of Syria is in violation of international law by arresting and continuing to detain Haitham Al-Maleh. This opinion comes in response to a petition filed by Mr. Al-Maleh's son, Iyas Maleh, who has retained Freedom Now and Hogan Lovells LLP as international *pro bono* counsel for his father. In its opinion, the Working Group calls on the Government of Syria to immediately release the human rights lawyer.

Freedom Now Executive Director Maran Turner stated: "The United Nations confirms that the Government of Syria is illegally detaining Mr. Al-Maleh. Syria is in breach of international law and must release Mr. Al-Maleh immediately. The Syrian government's detainment of this renowned human rights lawyer is shamefully illustrative of its intolerance to dissent and indifference to the rule of law."

The United Nations Working Group determined that the arrest and detention of Mr. Al-Maleh was "due to his exercise of his right to freedom of expression," in contravention of protections in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, a multi-party treaty by which Syria is bound. The Working Group further requests that the Government of Syria "release Mr. Maytham al-Maleh and accord him an enforceable right to compensation."

Mr. Al-Maleh was arrested in 2009 after speaking out against government abuses and providing a defense to political prisoners, including fellow human rights activist Muhannad Al-Hassani who is serving a three-year sentence on similar charges. The 80-year-old human rights lawyer has dedicated his life to advancing democratic and constitutional principles, serving as a judge in Syria for ten years and as the head of the Human Rights Association of Syria. These efforts, which have garnered him international praise, have been costly at home, landing him in prison several times since 1951 for such charges as "having insulted the president." On October 14, 2009, just two days after his appearance on the Barada Television Channel, where he criticized the government's ongoing declaration of a "state of emergency" and other abuses, Syrian authorities took Mr. Al-Maleh into custody. Ten months later, in a trial that fell far below international standards of due process, the Supreme State Security Court sentenced him to three years in prison for "spreading false news that could weaken the national morale."

Freedom Now, a non-profit, non-partisan organization that works to free prisoners of conscience, welcomes the UN's decision and calls on the Syrian government to comply with the UN decision, uphold its commitments to international law, and immediately release Mr. Al-Maleh.

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*Our mission is to free prisoners of conscience through focused legal, political and public relations advocacy efforts.*