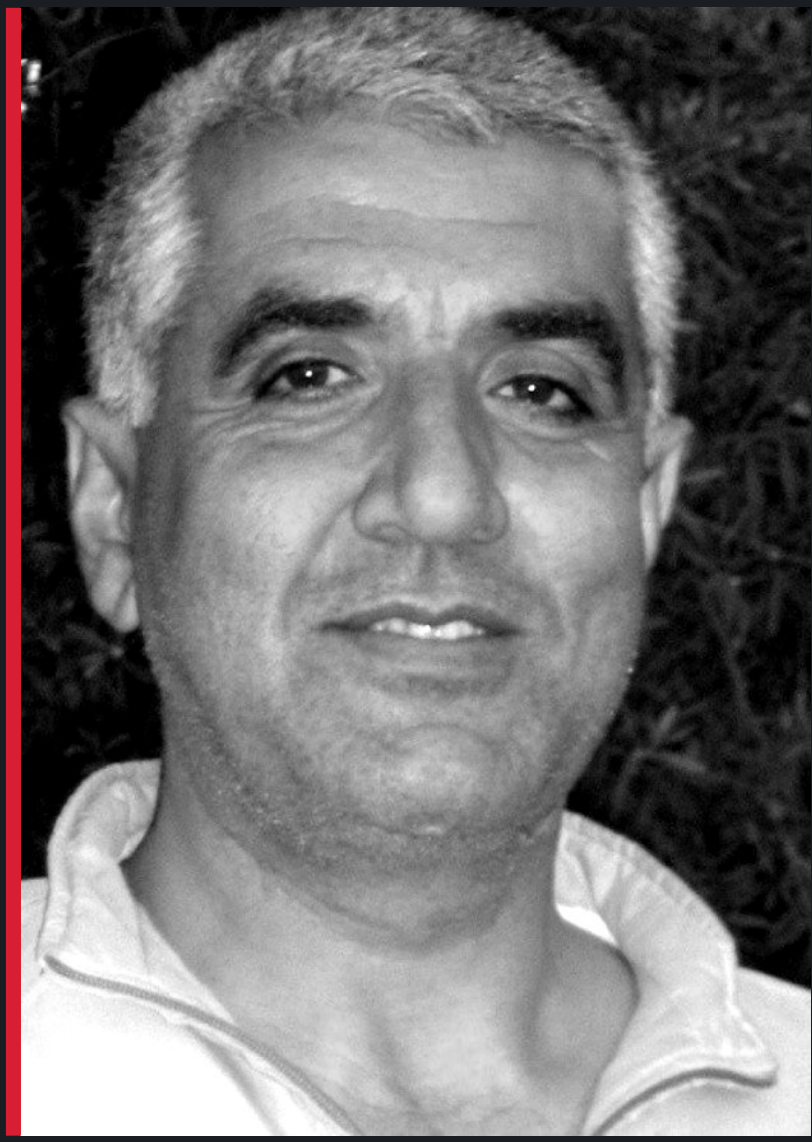

Advocacy dossier

Khalil Maatouk

خليل معتوق

Died in custody **Syria**

Khalil Maatouk is a Syrian human rights lawyer and director of the Syrian Center for Legal Studies and Research who defended political prisoners for more than 20 years, and who disappeared on his way to his Damascus office on 2 October 2012. On 31 October 2025 his family announced his death; its date, place and circumstances have not been made public.

01

The case at a glance

Khalil Maatouk is a Syrian human rights lawyer and director of the Syrian Center for Legal Studies and Research who defended political prisoners for more than 20 years, and who disappeared on his way to his Damascus office on 2 October 2012. On 31 October 2025 his family announced his death; its date, place and circumstances have not been made public.

Status	Arrested	Country
Died in custody	**2 Oct 2012**	**Syria**

What we ask

We call on the authorities to:

01 Order a full, independent, and impartial investigation into the killing of Khalil Maatouk, with timely public reporting on findings.

02 Identify and prosecute those responsible, both the direct perpetrators and any state officials who ordered, enabled, or covered up the killing.

03 Provide effective reparation to the family of Khalil Maatouk.

04 Take immediate steps to protect other defenders working in the same field from similar attacks.

02

How the case unfolded

2005

Travel ban imposed

Travel ban imposed over his advocacy for prisoners of conscience

Khalil Maatouk was banned from travelling from 2005 to 2011 because of his advocacy for prisoners of conscience, according to the Gulf Centre for Human Rights.

2 October 2012

Start of enforced disappearance

Disappears with his colleague Mohamed Zaza on the way to his Damascus office

On the morning of 2 October 2012, Khalil Maatouk left his home in Sahnaya, a suburb of Damascus, for his office in the capital, driven by his colleague Mohamed Zaza (also reported as Mohammed Thatha). Neither man arrived, and both phones stopped working. Several government checkpoints lay on the route, and his family and colleagues believed that security forces had detained them. The Syrian authorities denied holding them.

3 October 2012

Other act

Amnesty International raises concern over his serious lung condition

Amnesty International said that if the two men were held they should be released immediately and unconditionally unless charged with an internationally recognisable offence, and raised particular concern because Khalil Maatouk has a serious lung condition that requires medication and regular medical supervision.

February 2013

Other act

Authorities deny holding him after an inquiry by fellow lawyers

In February 2013, after an official inquiry by fellow lawyers, the Syrian authorities denied that they were holding Khalil Maatouk. They did not answer his family's repeated requests for information.

September 2013

Other act

Last reported sighting, at Military Intelligence's Palestine Branch in Damascus

Unofficial sources reported seeing Khalil Maatouk at State Security Branch 285 in Kafr Sousa and at an Air Force Intelligence branch in Damascus. He was last seen in September 2013 at Military Intelligence's Palestine Branch 235 in Damascus. A released detainee also told his lawyer that he had seen him at the State Security facility in Kafr Sousa; the general prosecutor denied that he was held there.

17 February 2014

Reprisal against relatives

His daughter Raneem Maatouk arrested at the family home

His daughter, the artist Raneem Maatouk, was arrested on 17 February 2014 at the family home in Sahnaya. She was held for four months and released on 11 June 2014. The family left Syria soon afterwards.

31 October 2025

Death in custody

Family announces his death, 13 years after his disappearance

On 31 October 2025, his daughter Raneem Maatouk announced on Facebook, on behalf of her mother and brother, the death of Khalil Maatouk. Her statement referred to his final moments before his execution. The family did not make public the date, place or circumstances of his death, and no official account has been reported. Funerals were to be held in Syria and in Leipzig, Germany.

6 November 2025

Other act

Gulf Centre for Human Rights says the Syrian government must establish the truth

The Gulf Centre for Human Rights said that the current Syrian government bears full responsibility for finding out the whole truth about what happened to Khalil Maatouk, and for identifying those responsible and bringing them to justice.

03

The full story

Update, 12 November 2026: Khalil Maatouk disappeared on 2 October 2012 on his way to his office in Damascus, on a road lined with government checkpoints. On 31 October 2025 his family announced his death; the date, place and circumstances have not been made public, and no official account has been reported.

Background and Work

Khalil Maatouk is a Syrian human rights lawyer. He was executive director of the Syrian Center for Legal Studies and Research and head of the Syrian Center for the Defence of Detainees. For more than 20 years he defended peaceful activists and political prisoners, representing hundreds of prisoners of conscience before military, state security and civil courts, and he co-authored texts on justice and fundamental freedoms. Among his clients was Mazen Darwish, director of the Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression, which lists him among its missing members. He publicly criticised practices that denied his clients a fair trial.

His work brought him under pressure from the authorities. He was banned from travelling from 2005 to 2011 because of his advocacy for prisoners of conscience, and a lawyer working on his case said he had been summoned to various security branches because of his work. In 2015, while he was missing, he was shortlisted for the Lawyers for Lawyers Award.

The Disappearance

On the morning of 2 October 2012, Khalil Maatouk, then 53, left his home in Sahnaya, a suburb of Damascus, for his office in the capital. His health prevented him from travelling alone, and he was driven by his colleague and friend Mohamed Zaza (also reported as Mohammed Thatha). The journey normally takes about 15 minutes and passes several checkpoints run by different security branches. Neither man arrived, and both phones stopped working. His family and colleagues believed that security forces had detained them.

In February 2013, after an official inquiry by fellow lawyers, the authorities denied holding him, and they did not answer the family's repeated requests for information. Unofficial sources reported seeing him at State Security Branch 285 in Kafr Sousa, at an Air Force Intelligence branch in Damascus and, in September 2013, at Military Intelligence's Palestine Branch 235. A Syrian lawyer who looked into the case told the Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression that he was held in a Political Security facility in Damascus, and people released from detention in 2015 told his family that they had seen him in several government facilities. The former government continued to deny any involvement.

Detention Conditions and Health

Khalil Maatouk has advanced lung disease that requires medication, regular injections in hospital and medical supervision. Amnesty International raised particular concern about his condition the day after his disappearance, and the Gulf Centre for Human Rights reports that he was denied the treatment he needed while in detention.

Reprisals Against His Family

His daughter, the artist Raneem Maatouk, was arrested on 17 February 2014 at the family home in

Sahnaya. She was held for four months and released on 11 June 2014, after which the family left Syria. Relatives told Amnesty International that his disappearance left the family without his protection and facing a hostile environment.

The Announcement of His Death

On 31 October 2025, Raneem Maatouk announced on Facebook, on behalf of her mother and brother, the death of her father. Her statement referred to his final moments before his execution. The family did not make public the date, place or circumstances of his death, and no official account has been reported. Funeral ceremonies were announced for Syria and for Leipzig, Germany. The fate of Mohamed Zaza has not been reported.

International Response

Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, the Gulf Centre for Human Rights, the Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies and Lawyers for Lawyers campaigned for his release over many years, and his case was featured in Amnesty International's campaign on the tens of thousands of people disappeared in Syria. After the family's announcement, the Gulf Centre for Human Rights said that the current Syrian government bears full responsibility for finding out the whole truth about what happened to him, and for identifying those responsible and bringing them to justice.

Latest updates on this case Scan the code or visit: https://humena.org/defenders/khalil-maatouk/

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