

PUBLIC

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UA 43/09 Fear of torture or other ill-treatment/possible prisoner of conscience

SYRIA Hassam Hussein 'Ali (m), aged 31, Kurdish political activist

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Kurdish political activist Hassam Hussein 'Ali has been held in incommunicado detention since his arrest by Military Intelligence agents on 3 December 2008. He is believed to still be held in the custody of Military Intelligence, possibly, according to some reports, at its Palestine Branch, an interrogation and detention centre in Damascus, putting him at serious risk of torture or other ill-treatment.

According to information received by Amnesty International, the whereabouts of Hassam Hussein 'Ali were revealed when he managed to send a text message to his friend's mobile phone from the detention centre.

Amnesty International believes Hassam Hussein 'Ali may be a prisoner of conscience, detained solely for the peaceful exercise of his rights to freedom of expression and association. He is believed to have been detained because of his activities as a member of a Kurdish political party, the Kurdish Azadi (Freedom) Party in Syria. Only the ruling Ba'ath Party and parties allied to it are officially allowed to operate in Syria and supporters of unauthorized opposition parties are at constant risk of arrest.

Hassam Hussein 'Ali is also a member of the board of directors of Noubhar Cultural Society that is related to the Kurdish Azadi party.

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Kurds in Syria are subject to serious human rights violations, as are other Syrians, but as a group they also suffer from identity-based discrimination, including heavy restrictions placed upon the use of the Kurdish language and culture. In addition, a large proportion of Syrian Kurds are effectively stateless and, as such, are denied the full provision of education, employment, health and other rights enjoyed by Syrian nationals, as well as being denied the right to have a nationality and passport. Those deemed to be associated with Kurdish political parties or groups which raise concerns about the treatment of Kurds in Syria are vulnerable to arbitrary arrest and detention and in many cases to torture and other ill-treatment.

Torture and other ill-treatment are widespread in Syria's detention and interrogation centres. In 2008, seven people were reported to have died as a possible result of abuses in custody. The authorities took no action to investigate these allegations. "Confessions" extracted under duress are systematically used as evidence in Syrian courts, and the defendants' claims that they have been tortured or otherwise ill-treated are almost never investigated.

## RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in English, Arabic, French or your own language:

- expressing concern that Hassam Hussein 'Ali is detained incommunicado, putting him at risk of torture or other ill-treatment;
- calling on the authorities to guarantee that Hassam Hussein 'Ali will not be tortured or otherwise ill-treated, and reminding them that Syria is a state party to the UN Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment;

- urging the authorities to allow Hassam Hussein 'Ali visits from his family immediately, and also access to a lawyer of his own choosing and any medical attention he may require;
- expressing concern that Hassam Hussein 'Ali may be a prisoner of conscience, detained solely for the peaceful expression of his rights to freedom of expression and association;
- calling on the authorities to release Hassam Hussein 'Ali immediately and unconditionally unless he is to be charged with a recognizably criminal offence.

**APPEALS TO:**

President

His Excellency Bashar al-Assad  
Presidential Palace  
Al-Rashid Street  
Damascus  
Syrian Arab Republic

**Fax:** + 963 11 332 3410  
**Salutation:** Your Excellency

Minister of Interior

His Excellency Major General Bassam Abdel Majid  
Ministry of Interior  
'Abd al-Rahman Shahbandar Street  
Damascus  
Syrian Arab Republic

**Fax:** +963 11 2223428  
**Salutation:** Your Excellency

Minister of Defence

His Excellency General Hassan Ali Turkmani  
Ministry of Defence  
Omayyad Square  
Damascus  
Syrian Arab Republic

**Fax:** +963 11 223 7842  
**Salutation:** Your Excellency

Minister of Justice

His Excellency Muhammad al-Ghafari  
Ministry of Justice  
Al-Nasr Street  
Damascus  
Syrian Arab Republic

**Fax:** +963 11 666 2460  
**Salutation:** Your Excellency

**COPIES TO:** diplomatic representatives of Syria accredited to your country.

**PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY.** Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 31 March 2009.