

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

News Flash

AI Index: MDE 24/023/2003 (Public)
News Service No: 167
11 July 2003

Syria: Charges must be dropped against Haytham al-Maleh

Amnesty International today called on the Syrian authorities to halt the trial of lawyer Haytham al-Maleh before the Military Court which is scheduled to convene tomorrow 12 July in Damascus, and for all charges brought against him to be dropped.

"The trial of human rights defender Haytham al-Maleh is yet another attempt on the part of the authorities to silence him and intimidate other human rights defenders for the sole reason of their peaceful involvement in human rights work in the country and for exercising their rights to freedom of expression and association," Amnesty International said.

The authorities must also lift as a matter of urgency all restrictions, especially the right to movement and to travel which they imposed on Haytham al-Maleh, the Director of Human Rights Association in Syria (HRAS), and lawyer Razan Zaytunah, a HRAS member, as well as other human rights defenders. Both lawyers have already lodged a suit against the Minister of the Interior before the administrative court for these restrictions to be lifted.

The charges brought against Haytham al-Maleh include the distribution of *Teyyarat* magazine without a license, involvement with an organization of an international nature (HRAS) without permission from the government, dissemination of "false news" and "inciting sectarian strife". The charges, including those brought under Articles 287 and 288 of the Penal Code can lead to up to three years in prison.

Amnesty International has repeatedly expressed its concern at trials before Syrian military courts as they do not guarantee a fair trial. Their procedures fall seriously short of international standards for fair trial, as well as Syria's own Code of Criminal Procedures.

Public Document

For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566

Amnesty International, 1 Easton St., London WC1X 0DW. web: <http://www.amnesty.org>

For latest human rights news view <http://news.amnesty.org>

