

URGENT ACTION

KURDISH ACTIVIST AT RISK OF TORTURE

Political activist Jakarkhon Sheikho 'Ali, a member of Syria's Kurdish minority, is being held incommunicado at the Military Security Branch in the city of Aleppo, north-east of the capital Damascus. He may be a prisoner of conscience, detained solely for the peaceful exercise of his rights to freedom of expression and association. He is at risk of torture and other ill-treatment.



Jakarkhon Sheikho 'Ali, aged 28, was arrested on the evening of 20 June, apparently by Syrian Military Security. For the first week of Jakarkhon Sheikho 'Ali's detention, his family did not have any information regarding his fate or whereabouts. Through an indirect source they have found out that he is being detained by the Military Security Branch in Aleppo. Syrian human rights organizations and Syrian Kurdish political parties believe that Jakarkhon Sheikho 'Ali has been detained by Syrian Military Security because of his activities as a senior member of the Kurdish Democratic al-Wifaq Party, an unauthorized Kurdish Syrian political party.

Two previous attempts to arrest Jakarkhon Sheikho 'Ali had failed. In early 2008, a patrol by Political Security, a separate security force, raided his then home in 'Efrin, a town near Aleppo, but he was out at the time. A Military Security patrol raided his new home in Aleppo in February 2009, and again he was out. Jakarkhon Sheikho 'Ali was also summoned for interrogation on at least three occasions in 2009 by either Political or Military Security but was not detained on any of them.

PLEASE WRITE IMMEDIATELY in Arabic, English, French or your own language:

- expressing concern that Jakarkhon Sheikho 'Ali appears to be a prisoner of conscience, detained solely for the peaceful exercise of his rights to freedom of expression and association, and calling on the authorities to release him immediately and unconditionally unless he is to be charged with a recognizably criminal offence;
- calling on the authorities to ensure that he 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 immediately allow him visits from his family, a lawyer of his choosing and any medical treatment he may require.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 12 AUGUST 2009 TO:

His Excellency President Bashar al-Assad
 President
 Presidential Palace
 al-Rashid Street
 Damascus
 Syrian Arab Republic
 Fax: **+963 11 332 3410**
 Salutation: **Your Excellency**

His Excellency Major S'aid Mohamed
 Samour
 Minister of Interior
 Ministry of Interior
 'Abd al-Rahman Shahbandar Street
 Damascus
 Syrian Arab Republic
 Fax: **+963 11 222 3428**
 Salutation: **Your Excellency**

And copies to:
 His Excellency Lieutenant- General Ali
 Ben-Mohammed Habib Mahmoud
 Minister of Defence
 Ministry of Defence
 Omayyad Square
 Damascus
 Syrian Arab Republic
 Fax: **+963 11 223 7842**
 Salutation: **Your Excellency**

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country.
 Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.



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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Kurds in Syria suffer discrimination because of their ethnicity; many of them are denied Syrian nationality and therefore do not receive the full provision of education, employment, health care and other rights enjoyed by Syrian nationals. Kurdish human rights defenders and civil society activists, and those deemed to be associated with Kurdish political parties or groups who may raise concerns about the treatment of Kurds in Syria, are particularly at risk of arbitrary arrest and in many cases torture and other ill-treatment. One such case is that of Mesh'al al-Tammo, a Kurdish political activist and prisoner of conscience. He was sentenced on 11 May 2009 by the Damascus Criminal Court to three and a half years' imprisonment for his peaceful activities as the spokesperson of the Kurdish Future Current in Syria, an unauthorized political party.

Mesh'al al-Tammo was arrested on 15 August 2008 and his whereabouts remained unknown until his transfer to 'Adra Prison near Damascus on 26 August. Serious concerns about the length of time that he spent in pre-trial detention and the fairness of trial proceedings have been raised previously. Mesh'al al-Tammo's lawyers are reported to have asked to call a total of seven defence witnesses to give evidence at the trial, but the court failed to respond to the request, meaning that none were able to appear. The right of the accused to call and question witnesses is a cornerstone of the right of defence in a fair trial.

UA: 176/09, Index: MDE 14/017/2009, Issue Date: 01 July 2009

