

PUBLIC

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UA 226/01

Prisoner of Conscience

7 September 2001

SYRIA

Riad Seif (m), Parliamentarian, Age 54

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Riad Seif, an independent member of the Syrian National Assembly (Parliament) was arrested on 6 September, one day after hosting a political seminar at his house in the outskirts of Damascus. Amnesty International considers Riad Seif to be a prisoner of conscience, arrested solely for his opinions and peaceful opposition activities.

Between 400 and 500 people reportedly attended the seminar organized by Riad Seif and hosted by the National Dialogue Forum, during which the guest speaker Professor Burhan Ghaliun, called for political reform and democratic elections. According to an official spokesperson, Riad Seif was prosecuted following a "special permission" from the National Assembly which removed his parliamentary immunity. Syrian press reports state that a judge issued a warrant for his arrest, but it is not known what he has been charged with.

#### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Riad Seif is a leader and organizer of the National Dialogue Forum (a group within the emerging civil society movement in Syria) and the second member of parliament to be arrested in the last four weeks. Mamun al-Homsi was arrested on 9 August, two days after he began a hunger strike in protest at official corruption and the massive powers wielded by the security forces. (See UA 205/01, 10 August 2001, MDE 24/026/2001)

Another prominent opposition figure Riad al-Turk was detained last week, three years after being released from prison, where he was held as a prisoner of conscience from 1980 to 1998 because of his opposition to the Syrian government. (See UA 217/01, 3 September 2001, MDE 24/027/2001)

The Syrian authorities had imposed a number of restrictions on discussion forums and activities of civil society groups in February 2001.

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

- calling for Riad Seif to be released immediately and unconditionally, as a prisoner of conscience;
- seeking assurances that he is being well treated in custody and not tortured or ill-treated;
- urging the authorities to ensure that he is allowed immediate access to his family, lawyer and any medical care he needs.

#### APPEALS TO:

His Excellency

President Bashar al-Assad

Presidential Palace

Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic

**Telegrams: President al-Assad, Damascus, Syria**

**Telexes: 419160 prespl sy**

**Salutation: Your Excellency**

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His Excellency  
Nabil al-Khatib  
Ministry of Justice  
Al-Nasr Street  
Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic  
**Telegrams: Justice Minister, Damascus, Syria**  
**Fax: + 963 11 224 6250**  
**Salutation: Your Excellency**

His Excellency  
Dr Muhammad Harba  
Minister of the Interior  
Ministry of the Interior  
Merjeh Circle  
Damascus  
Syrian Arab Republic  
**Telegrams: Interior Minister, Damascus, Syria**  
**Faxes: + 963 11 222 3428**  
**Telexes: 411016 AFIRS SY**  
**Salutation: Your Excellency**

**COPIES TO:**

His Excellency  
Nasser Qaddur  
State Minister for Foreign Affairs  
Ministry of Foreign Affairs  
Al-Rashid Street  
Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic  
**Fax: + 963 11 332 0686**  
**Salutation: Your Excellency**

and 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 19 October 2001.