

PUBLIC

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UA 203/05

Fear of torture/incommunicado detention/prisoners of conscience

SYRIA

Yassin al-Hamwi (m), aged about 60, shopkeeper, founding member of the Committee of the Families of Prisoners of Opinion and Conscience

Muhammad 'Ali al-'Abdullah (m), law student, founding member of the Committee of the Families of Prisoners of Opinion and Conscience

The security forces have arrested the two leading members of a newly-established support group for the families of prisoners of conscience. The two men are held incommunicado, which puts them at grave risk of torture. Amnesty International considers them to be prisoners of conscience, arrested solely for exercising their right to freedom of expression.

Yassin al-Hamwi and Muhammad 'Ali al-'Abdullah held the first meeting of the Committee of the Families of Prisoners of Opinion and Conscience on 25 July, in the town of Darya, near the capital, Damascus. They were arrested on 26 and 27 July respectively, and are held at the Political Security branch in Damascus.

Yassin al-Hamwi was reportedly arrested at his shop in Darya. The Committee meeting had been held at his house and he had apparently been summoned for questioning by the Darya police one hour after the meeting ended. Muhammad 'Ali al-'Abdullah was arrested at his home in Qatana, near Damascus.

Yassin al-Hamwi's son, Haytham al-Hamwi, is also a prisoner of conscience. In April 2004 he was sentenced to four years' imprisonment for "attempting to establish a religious organisation, involvement in unlicensed social activities and attending unlicensed religious and intellectual classes," following a grossly unfair trial before a secret Field Military Court (see UA 248/04, MDE 24/054/2004, 16 August 2004).

Muhammad 'Ali al-'Abdullah is the son of prisoner of conscience 'Ali al-'Abdullah. He was detained on 15 May 2005, one week after he read a statement on behalf of the exiled leader of the Muslim Brotherhood at a meeting of the Jamal al-Atassi Forum, a political discussion group which was itself then closed down by the authorities. He is now in solitary confinement awaiting trial before the Supreme State Security Court (SSSC) on charges of "promoting an illegal organisation." (See UA 139/05, MDE 24/032/2005, 25 May 2005 and follow-ups).

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Syrian authorities systematically harass people they view as critics, including human rights defenders. Several have been detained, some incommunicado, and some have been charged by the SSSC, whose standards fall far short of international standards for fair trial (see public statement *Syria: End crackdown on human rights defenders*, MDE 24/034/2005, 25 May 2005).

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

- calling on the authorities to release Yassin al-Hamwi and Muhammad 'Ali al-'Abdullah immediately and unconditionally, as they are prisoners of conscience, detained solely for exercising their right to freedom of expression;

- expressing concern that Yassin al-Hamwi and Muhammad 'Ali al-'Abdullah are held incommunicado, and urging that they be allowed visits from their families, lawyers of their choice and any medical attention that they may require;
- seeking assurances that Yassin al-Hamwi and Muhammad 'Ali al-'Abdullah are not being tortured or ill-treated, and reminding the authorities that they acceded to the Convention against Torture (CAT) in 2004;
- reminding the authorities that on 2 August 2005 the UN Human Rights Committee stated that they should "immediately release all persons detained because of their activities in the field of human rights and end all harassment and intimidation of human rights defenders".

APPEALS TO:

His Excellency President Bashar al-Assad
President of the Republic
Presidential Palace
Abu Rummaneh, Al-Rashid Street
Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic
Fax: + 963 11 332 3410
Salutation: Your Excellency

His Excellency General Ghazi Kan'an
Minister of Interior, Ministry of Interior
Merjeh Circle
Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic
Fax + 963 11 222 3428
Email: admin@civilaffair-moi.gov.sy
Salutation: Your Excellency

His Excellency Muhammad al-Ghafari
Minister of Justice
Ministry of Justice
Al-Nasr Street
Damascus
Syrian Arab Republic
Fax: + 963 11 222 3428
Salutation: Your Excellency

COPIES TO: 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 14 September 2005.