

PUBLIC

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Further Information on UA 232/07 (MDE 24/042/2007, 31 August 2007) Medical concern New concern: prisoner of conscience

SYRIA

Riad Seif (m), former independent member of parliament

Riad Seif was arrested on 28 January, and is being held at 'Adra prison in Damascus. Amnesty International considers him to be a prisoner of conscience, and is calling for his immediate and unconditional release. Riad Seif suffers from advanced prostate cancer. There is great concern that his detention now may place his life at risk.

Riad Seif is the 11th person to be arrested for attending a meeting organized by the pro-democracy umbrella group, Damascus Declaration for Democratic National Change (DDDNC), on 1 December 2007 (see UA 333/07, MDE 24/045/2007, 17 December 2007, and follow-ups). Amnesty International believes that the 11 are all prisoners of conscience, detained solely for the peaceful exercise of their right to freedom of expression and association.

Riad Seif requires specialist cancer treatment that is only available outside Syria. However, the Syrian authorities have repeatedly denied him permission to leave the country to obtain such treatment. Prisoners in 'Adra may generally have access only to basic medical treatment. It is not known if he has been otherwise ill-treated while detained, but there are reports that all other 10 DDDNC have indeed suffered from ill-treatment during this period of detention.

Riad Seif and all of the DDDNC detainees are facing trial on charges of "weakening national sentiments" (under Article 285 of the Syrian Penal Code), "broadcasting false or exaggerated news which would affect the morale of the country" (Article 286), joining an "organization formed with the purpose of changing the financial or social status of the state" (Article 306), "inciting sectarian strife" (Article 307), and "joining a secret association" (Article 327).

Riad Seif is a former independent member of the Syrian People's Assembly (parliament). A former prisoner of conscience, he was previously detained for over four years after organising a meeting calling for greater democracy in Syria. He has been harassed and ill-treated by the authorities since his release two years ago, but has continued to champion democratic reform.

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

- calling for the immediate release of Riad Seif, and for all charges against him to be dropped, as he appears to be based solely on his peaceful exercise of his right to express his beliefs, as granted by the International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), to which Syria is a state party;
- calling for Riad Seif to be allowed to travel abroad immediately so that he can obtain necessary medical treatment;
- calling on the Syrian authorities to fulfil their obligation to ensure Riad Seif enjoys the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, as set out in Article 12 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR);
- urging the Syrian authorities to implement measures laid out in the UN Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, which allow for "the right, individually and in association with

others, to promote and to strive for the protection and realization of human rights and fundamental freedoms at the national and international levels".

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 Health

His Excellency Dr Maher al-Husami
Minister of Health
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Salutation: Your Excellency

Minister of Justice

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

Minister of Foreign Affairs

His Excellency Walid Mu'allim
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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 13 March 2008.